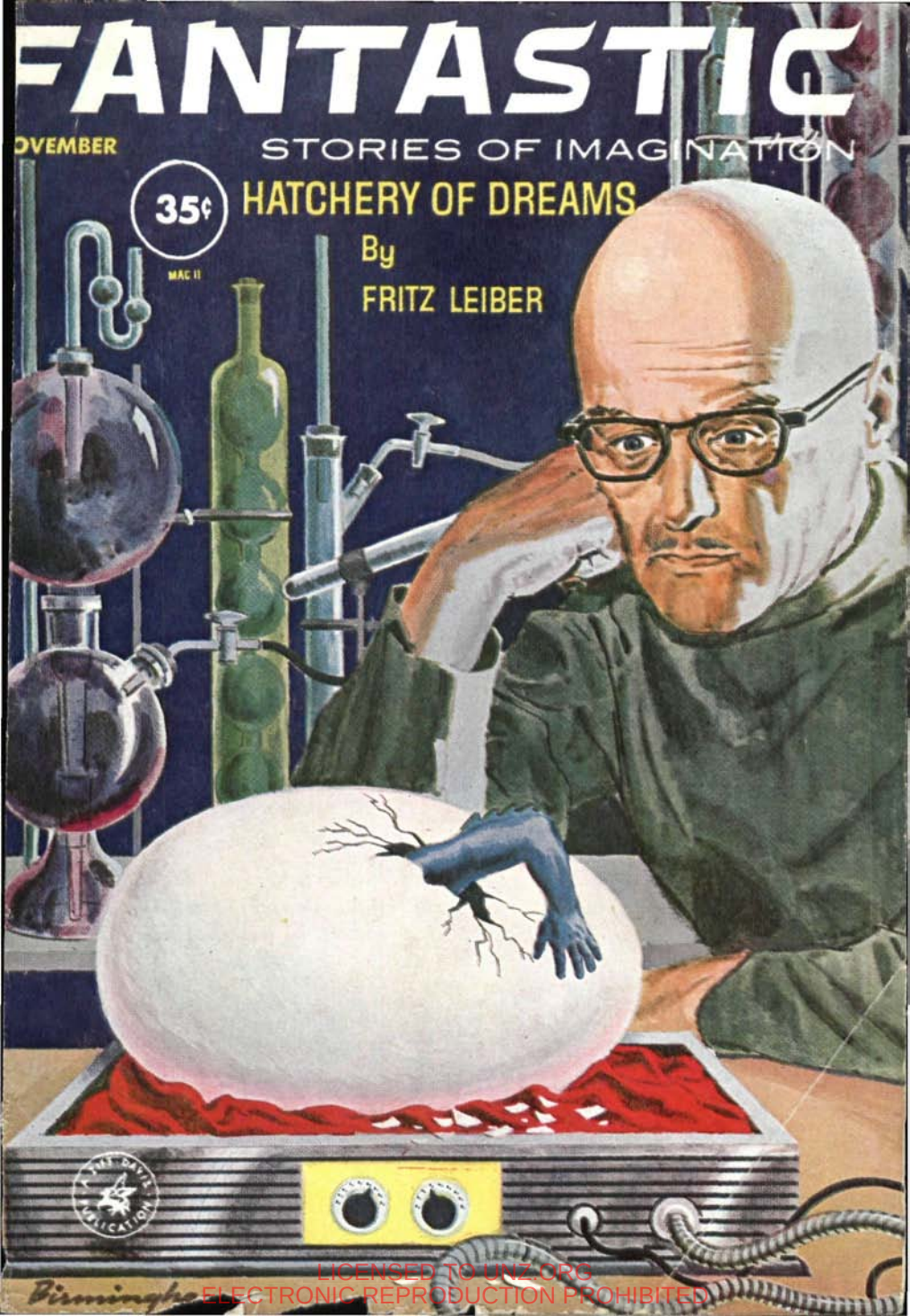


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In November Amazing Fact and Science Fiction stories

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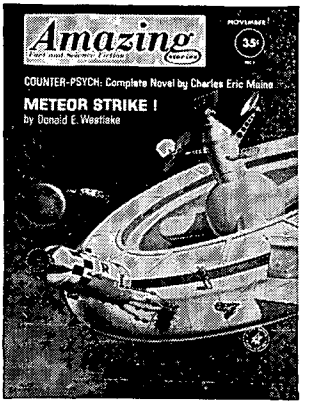


*The meteor struck the satellite station and wedged itself into the rim of one of the compartments. At any moment it might blow out and cause destruction beyond imagination. It was up to the Cargo Master, and to a devil-may-care recruit, to get outside and perform the tricky job of repairing the damage. Find out what it's really like to work on a danger-ridden assignment with only the moon above you and the earth below in METEOR STRIKE! by Donald Westlake.*

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# FANTASTIC
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

NOVEMBER 1961
Volume 10 Number 11

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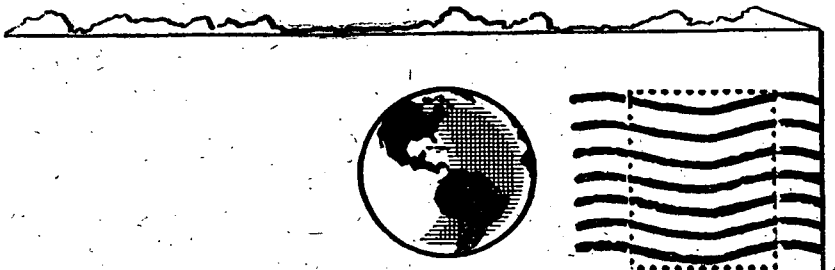

# According to you...

Dear Editor:

Recently LIFE Magazine stated that there are more than two million science fiction fans in the United States. It goes on to say that no other form of literature "can provide you with such thrilling and unprecedented adventures." I feel that living in the space age has brought out the rise in the number of people who have turned to science fiction because of the slowness of the transition into the fullfledged world of outer space.

When the new eleventh grade literature books were passed out the first story was "Of Missing Persons," by Jack Finney. A few stories later, "The Pedestrian," by Ray Bradbury made an appearance. I was really thrilled when I saw them in there. This is another example of science fiction coming into its own. Everyone in my English class thoroughly enjoyed them both.

In our newspaper recently, there appeared a cartoon that summed up the situation very nicely. There was a middle-aged man sitting in his easy chair, reading a book of science fiction. On the television there is a picture of a rocket getting ready to blast off. The man was saying, "In here we reached the moon forty years ago."

Miss Ida Ipe
1625 E. Indianola Ave.
Youngstown 2, Ohio

● *We didn't know SF was now making the textbooks. It is good news to all of us interested in the field.*

Dear Editor:

Actually this letter goes not to you, but to one Christopher

(*Continued on page 125*)



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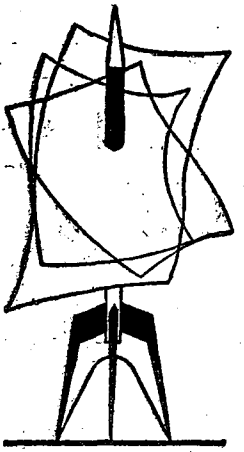

## EDITORIAL

THERE's a new party game going around that is more than a game; matter of fact, it is a sort of verbal Rorschach test. You outline a series of actions to your pigeon, ask him (or her) to describe the way he or she views the situation and feels about it, and from these reactions you can make your personality analyses.

In expert hands this little device might possibly have significant value. In amateur hands it can—if not carried to extremes, if indulged in as a game, and if taken with a pound or two of salt—be fun. With that warning, here is how it goes:

You are walking in a forest (you tell your subject). What kind of a place is it, and how do you feel about finding yourself there? (In each case, the subject makes his answer before you proceed to the next point.)

As you walk through the forest you find a key. What does the key look like, and what do you do with it?

Farther along you come to a body of water. Describe it (a well? pond? mudhole? lake? river) and tell whether you by-pass it or cross it, and how.

You find a vessel, or a container, in the woods. What kind of vessel is it? What, if anything, is in it? What do you do with vessel and/or contents?

You meet a bear. What do you do?

You discover an edifice. What does it look like, and do you go inside or not?

NOW, if you want to know what this is all about, here is the simple key.

The forest is Life.
The key is Ego.
The body of water is Love.
The vessel is Sex.
The bear is Trouble.
The edifice is Death.

Warning: Almost anything anyone says in response to these state-

(*Continued on page 130*)



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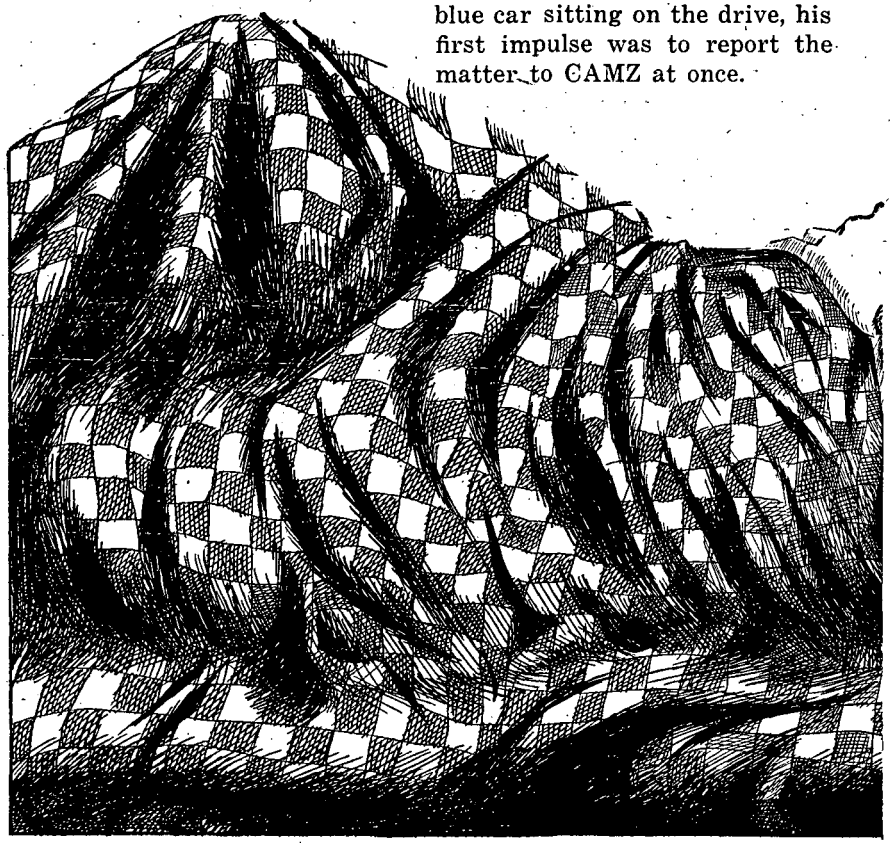
# Hatchery of Dreams

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrator ADKINS

WHEN Giles Wardwell woke up Saturday morning and Joan wasn't beside him in bed or anywhere in the house and there was no message on the slate in the kitchen or any response when he banged on the door of her lab, and when a glance showed their blue car sitting on the drive, his first impulse was to report the matter to CAMZ at once.





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*Giles Wardwell was a man not easily given to following the directions of a blue lizard. However, his wife was missing, the other witc —er, girls were cursed, and all in all there was no help for it.*

Grim old Mr. Copps himself had warned the whole CAMZ staff that all their lives and those of their loved ones were in slight but definite danger from America's enemies now that Copps, Arbuthnot, Mather, and Zim were doing public relations work for the Secondman Missiles Project. Mr. Zim, looking almost equally

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a dour Puritan father despite his Turkish background, had filled them in with some excruciating first-hand details on Russian espionage methods.

Just before they'd gone to sleep last night Joan had asked Giles, "Do the Russians have hypnosis beams? I have the feeling someone's trying to get control of my mind." And he had replied in a joking way that made him sick to remember, "Only in science-fiction magazines," to her first remark and "Probably your mother-in-law, God help us," to her second.

Giles decided to put on his glasses and have a closer look around before calling CAMZ. He didn't find the red nightgown Joan had been wearing, but he did find the little penned note on the bedside table.

"Dear Giles (it read), I'm taking a vacation from our marriage, maybe for a month, maybe forever. In case it's the latter I'll let you know. You know I don't fit in. Anyhow, I can't stick your stodgy conformity—or your mother's!—any longer. Maybe being with other humans will give me perspective. You can be respectable to the hilt and tell people I'm visiting Mable in Wisconsin, but that's not where I'm going. Good luck. Joan."

When Giles Wardwell had read that, Russia was a name in the geography books, CAMZ were eccentric wheels, and an old fear of his had become an active torment: the knowledge that he was fifteen years older than Joan and a proper Bostonian, and that being bald as an egg from thirty-five on was not at all the same thing as being romantically shaven-headed like Yul Brynner.

HE'D been afraid once or twice before that Joan was unhappy, though that was by no means his deepest fear about her. He'd known she couldn't stand his mother, though they only saw the old lady two or three times a week. He'd thought Joan was restless lately, in spite of her bridge and cosmetics hobbies. And certainly she didn't exactly fit in—she had no real friends he knew of in the Boston area except for the three amusing but socially off-trail women who made up her bridge foursome.

He wondered where she could have gone. Mr. and Mrs. Bishop—Joan's parents—were both dead and there were no uncles, aunts, or close cousins. Mable was just a college roommate, rarely mentioned. Joan did have a little money in an account of her own.

While he was thinking these things, Giles' feet had been carrying him, still in his dull olive pullover pyjamas, on another circuit of the house and now brought him up short at the door



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to Joan's lab. He hesitated—he'd always sensed (though Joan had never told him in so many words) that she didn't like him to barge into her perfume distillery and he had made a point of never offending, and besides the place was associated in his mind with his deepest fear about her.

Then he opened the door and went in.

His first impression was of gloom—the shades were tightly drawn—and an unnatural heat.

The small flasks and jars, the electric mixer for cold cream, and the elaborate distilling setups all seemed to be in their usual places.

He switched on the overhead light.

Then he saw it: a silver-sided platform with heavy cables leading from it and resting on it on its side a huge white egg almost exactly the size of his own head —in fact, his instant fantastic thought was that it was a horrid tableau set up to ridicule his baldness.

He went up to it. The heat was coming from the platform, all right—the humpy soft reddish fabric on which the egg rested was almost too hot to touch. And there seemed to be a faint vibration in the stuff, barely perceptible to the fingertips.

The egg looked astonishingly genuine. Minute pores dimpled its surface.

But it was far too large for an ostrich egg or any other Giles could conceive. And it was being kept at a far higher temperature, he was quite sure, than that used for any normal hatching. He started to turn the heat down, then wondered if he could figure out how, then decided not to try. He put his ear near the shell but couldn't hear anything moving inside.

Beside the platform was a deep cardboard box big enough to have held the egg. It was silvered on the outside, half full of cotton wool, and silver ribbons were strewn around.

Giles recognized the box. Joan had brought it back from her last Bridge Wednesday, explaining it contained a china atrocity she'd won but never wanted to look at again and which she intended to give Giles' mother for her birthday.

Vastly confused, Giles clamped onto one valid-seeming train of thought with just two cars: one —no woman with a fabulous egg hatching in her laboratory would willingly go away for a day, let alone a month or forever, no matter how much she loathed her husband; two—if anyone knew anything about Joan or the egg, it would be one or more of her three bridge partners: Mary Nurse, Margo Cory, and Alice Something-or-other — Greene? No, Redd!



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THIRTY minutes later Giles had hurriedly dressed, sketchily shaved, swallowed a cup of coffee with a tablespoon of the powdered in it, and was piloting the blue, sedately chromeless car from the Wardwell home "back of Back Bay," as he liked to describe it, to Margo Cory's improbable address on Prince Street in Boston's crooked, crowded North End.

None of the three women had been in the phone books and Joan didn't keep an address book Giles could find. Margo Cory's address had only turned up on an empty envelope that had slipped down behind Joan's desk.

Giles never liked visiting the North End and he didn't want to think about the egg because it was, to put it mildly, impossible. He spent the drive totting up how stodgily conformist he could be accused of being. He was at least par for the Boston course, he decided. For instance, he had recently given up chess and concentrated on bird-watching because Mr. Mather had pointed out that too many Slavic and Baltic types played chess. "Semites too, of course," Mather had finished primly. "I think we must look on it as purely a Russian game."

Could his Sunday bird-watching have anything to do with the egg? More fantastic ridicule? Giles doubted if he had ever trained his binoculars on a bird that had an egg much bigger than a gumdrop.

Margo Cory's address turned out to be a brand-new narrow tall glass-walled apartment building. As he went up to the twelfth floor in the newfangled glass-backed elevator, the Old North Church became visible across the roofs and then the green square of Copps Hill Burying Ground over toward the Inner Harbor.

Margo Cory's apartment was furnished in pale Swedish modern that went oddly with the dark tone in the glass. Margo herself wore bare feet, a gray linen robe and her short hair was tousled like a boy's. It gave Giles a pang to see how young she was, remembering Joan was no older. He must seem an old fogey to them all, he told himself.

He thought she was carrying hugged to her chest a motionless pale tan kitten, then he saw it had overbuilt shoulders, canine teeth like great daggers, and forepaws that suggested hands.

Margo noted his gaze and giggled. "Kitty's just a Steiff toy, made of plush," she said. "Did you know teddy bears were Steiff toys named after Teddy Roosevelt? This one's a kind of sabertooth tiger. Here, look."

She thrust it briefly toward him. With the same movement the top of her robe fell apart,



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showing she was not at all boyish in that area and dressed solely for showering. She seemed unconscious of the exposure.

"No, I haven't seen Joan since Wednesday," she told Giles. She swung nervously toward the view-wall with a flash of legs. "Why don't you come over here beside me," she said with an odd chuckle, "and enjoy my view?"

Another time Giles might have been tempted, proper Bostonian or no. Now he said, "Miss Cory, I *am* looking for my wife."

She faced him. "You really are worried about Joan, aren't you?"

"Of course!" He grimaced at her and rapidly waved his fingers together at chest level. She scowled back at him and at last pulled her robe tight around her.

"I'm an exhibitionist, Mr. Wardwell, *and* a nymphomaniac," she announced defiantly. "It's a very rare combination."

"Really, Miss Cory, you don't have to tell me these things," he countered.

"I certainly do," she retorted. "If I tell them I don't have to do them. Think what I'm sparing you. But if I can't do them I have to tell them."

He might have reacted stuffily to this frankness. Instead he felt something open inside himself that he had kept carefully closed all day in spite of the egg and other shocks.

"Miss Cory," he said, "do you think my wife dabbles in witchcraft?"

"*Dabbles?*" the girl yelled. "Why, what a weird question. There's no such thing as witchcraft."

"I know," Giles said, pouring it off his chest, "but she has this lab where she concocts things, and I've heard her mutter gibberish that might be incantations and spells, and she has a lonely bitter attitude toward life, and then she could be descended from the first witch hanged at Salem in 1692—even if Bridget Bishop isn't known to have had children. And then we've got the tradition of witchcraft all around us here in New England and Boston and especially right here in the North End." He gestured at the smoky window. "Why right over there in Copps Hill the Mathers are buried who did so much to fight it and—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Wardwell, but I can't listen to you any longer," the girl interrupted. "I'm a bit psychotic, as I've told you, some days more than others, and today is one of the real bad ones—I'd fall apart if it weren't for Kitty here." She clutched the plush sabertooth to her. "I'll give you Alice Redd's address—maybe she can tell you something about Joan."

She called brightly after him down the corridor, incidentally letting her robe fall open again,



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"Remember, Mr. Wardwell, there's no such thing as witchcraft!"

ALICE REDD lived in a dignified old apartment on Louisburg Square back across the Common and she seemed in other ways the antithesis of Margo Cory—a china-delicate young woman with pale reddish hair and wearing a robe of thick brocaded white silk that was conspicuously buttoned from neck to hem.

She spoiled the effect somewhat by moaning immediately, "Come in quickly, Mr. Wardwell, so I can collapse again. Ooh, what a fuzzy black head I've got inside, this morning. I know I shouldn't mix barbiturates with alcohol, but there must be more to it than that."

She pointed vaguely at a chair and let herself down onto a spindle-legged couch, to the head of which was hanging by one paw a small dark brown stiff monkey made of what Giles decided must be the finest basket weave—the texture suggested tiny scales.

Alice Redd reached out feebly and put a finger in the other paw. "Pongo's such a help on mornings like this," she told Giles. "I don't know what I'd do without him. He keeps off the black megrims and things. He's supposed to come from Hong Kong or maybe Malaya.

"Yes, Mr. Wardwell, I do so much enjoy the bridge with Joan and the other girls. Do you know, we're hoping eventually to get together three tables, so there'd be twelve of us, and have duplicate tournaments. Then we'd need a man to be tournament director, a woman would be much too flighty. Has Joan said anything to you—? Ooh, my head!

"No, I haven't seen Joan since Wednesday. Mary Nurse might be able to tell you something, I'll give you her address, though she's been laid up with 'flu the last two days. There seems to be something wrong with all of us, doesn't there? Oooh!

"No, I don't think Joan was unhappy, Mr. Wardwell. I'll tell you one thing, though—she didn't like those CAMZ people you work for, she thought they were too restrictive and inquiring and dictatorial. Certainly we have to worry about the Russians, but Joan says those CAMZ people enjoy worrying, they must bathe in black megrims. I know they're fine old Boston men, most of them, but didn't Mr. Arbuthnot work for Senator McCarthy and isn't Mr. Mather descended from the witchhunting Mathers—Cotton, Increase, and— Oooh! Pongo, come here, comfort Mother."

"Speaking of witches, Miss Redd," Giles said on impulse, "I've just had an amusing thought. You know how each



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witch is supposed to have a familiar?—a little animal given her by Satan to protect her and help her work magic? Well, if old Cotton Mather could have been with me this morning and seen Mary Cory with Kitty and you with Pongo—"

"Ha-ha-ha, very funny. And Mary Nurse with Pounce. He'd have called them poppets, because they aren't alive, but he'd have claimed they came alive when people's backs were turned — Oooh! Pongo, make it stop!

"But Mr. Wardwell, if you were seriously thinking about witchcraft, surely you'd have asked Joan herself— No, I can see you're the Boston type who never asks crucial questions until it's much too late or something— Oooh!"

"I wonder," Giles said softly, "in what *form* Satan would give familiars to witches? Not in a brown paper bag, surely, or just hand them over by the scruff of the neck—you'd think there'd be a little more ceremony to it."

"Ha-ha-ha— Ooooh! Mr. Wardwell, I'm sorry, but Pongo and I are going to have to curl up and go to sleep, it's the only way we'll ever get through this. But first I'll write you Mary Nurse's address."

GILES didn't look at it until he was outside, standing beside the black iron pickets fencing the private park that occupied Louisburg Square. It turned out to be on Salem Street and he shrank from going back into the North End, so he drove home, relieved to find the house wasn't burning down, and sat watching the egg and thinking a great variety of mad disturbing thoughts.

He reread Joan's note several times. As far as he could tell, it was her handwriting or a good imitation, but he noticed now that there were three expressions in it which she detested: "In case," "Anyhow," and "humans" for "human beings." If someone had wanted to convince him that Joan had run away and keep him from making inquiries, they might have concocted a note like this.

Once he got a tack hammer and poised it above the egg . . . and after a few seconds carried the hammer back to the kitchen.

And once he thought he heard something stir inside the egg. He bent his ear to it until his cheek was burning hot, but heard nothing more.

After three hours of that he drove back to the North End. He passed the CAMZ headquarters in the new building in Sewall Court, recalling that it was named for Judge Sam Sewall, who had presided over the Salem witch trials. He passed the Paul Revere house with its strange



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nail-studded door exactly like that in the house of the hanged Salem witch Rebecca Nurse.

Nurse.

Salem Street was noisy with pushcarts and the evening air seemed to carry as much Italian as English.

Mary Nurse's address was a dreary walk-up over a fish store with windows smeary-tracked by live snails and tiny climbing squid. He remembered Joan telling him Mary Nurse was an artist keen on local color.

But she'd made some changes. Her door at the end of the corridor wasn't like the others, but unpainted oak studded with rows of nail-heads.

In answer to his knock a deep voice called to him to come in.

The room was stuffy and crowded, easels elbowing chairs and bookcases—studio and living room combined.

And bedroom. The light of two thick candles showed Mary Nurse lying on a wide studio couch under a quilt of diamond patches. She was a big girl—five foot ten, he'd judged—but now she lay like a log, looking really sick, pale, her thick black hair streaming across the pillow.

But her deep voice was steady enough. "I've been expecting you, Giles Wardwell. Margo Cory dropped in this afternoon."

"I'm sorry about your 'flu," Giles said.

"This isn't 'flu," Mary Nurse said with a deep unhumorous chuckle. "Someone's put a curse on me. On all of us, I'd say. What are you looking around for?"

"Pounce," Giles admitted.

Again the big blonde chuckled. She beckoned to Giles and lifted the quilt a little. Giles looked—and almost jumped out of the room.

Crouched on the sheet beside her, just under her arm, was a jet-black spider with a body big as a flattened grapefruit and furry black legs that would have spanned a platter. Around the body were wedges of bright green, while two ruby-red eyes glared up at him.

It couldn't be real, Giles told himself. It must be—

"Black velvet." For a third time Mary Nurse chuckled. She dropped the quilt. "Just the same, I'd probably be dead without Pounce. You've surely noticed by now how neurotically dependent we are on our little . . . toys. That's why Joan's in trouble—she doesn't have one . . . yet."

Giles was staring at the top of a bookcase back in the shadows. It seemed to have an egg on it as big as that in Joan's lab.

"Surely you've noticed other things about us too," Mary Nurse was saying.

"Your door, your name," Giles said, edging between an easel



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and a chair toward the bookcase.

"All our names are witch names. Even your name, Giles Wardwell. Samuel Wardwell was one of the five wizards hung in Salem. Giles Cory was pressed to death with rocks on his chest for refusing to testify."

Giles saw that the egg was an empty shell, cracked across and with a huge hole in one side. "What's that?" he asked sharply.

"That's the shell of a spider—I mean, dinosaur . . ." Mary Nurse broke off and looked at him burningly. "I don't think we need to fence any longer, Giles Wardwell. You've found Joan's egg? Unbroken?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Then if you love your wife, be there when it hatches. I think there's time. I'd go but I'm too cursed to move. I'd send the Black Man, but we haven't one. Joan's only hope and safety are in the egg. Follow the signs. Call it Grizzle. Don't ask questions. Hurry!"

"I will."

"The Horned God go with you, Giles Wardwell."

THE lab seemed hotter than before when Giles got back to it, but that may have been because he was sweating. At first the egg seemed intact, then he saw there was a tiny triple crack radiating from a point near the top. As he watched, one of the branches lengthened abruptly by the width of a finger. There was a faint scratching and rustling inside.

He settled down to watch, gripping his knees with shaking hands. The heat alone was making him feel faint. He stripped off his coat and shirt, noting without much surprise that he was still wearing his pyjama top under the latter.

The cracks lengthened. Others appeared. Suddenly bits of shell flew and a tiny blue arm with a jagged crest on it like a lizard's shot out, groped around wildly, and then jerked in.

Trembling, Giles moved around the egg, trying to peer in but staying at arm's length.

Two tiny blue hands were methodically breaking away small fragments of shell, enlarging the hole. He couldn't see more of the creature, it was too dark inside.

The room began to swim. Giles dragged at the collar of his pyjamas, then staggered to the window and heaved it up, sucked in three breaths of cool air. The room steadied. He saw that the hole in the egg was now big as a spread hand.

He was halfway back to it when something blue shot out, scurried in a circle across the floor three times, too fast to be seen definitely, and dove out the open window.



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Giles grabbed up his coat and went out the front door and looked around in the dark. He couldn't see anything on the lawn or drive. He walked around the front of his car and froze.

A stocky jewel-blue lizard was crouched down on the hood of his car exactly as if it were a moderately ornate radiator ornament. It seemed to grip into the blue-painted metal with its hind claws and left forepaw or arm. The right arm, extended beside its hideously crested face, was pointed straight ahead.

"Grizzle!" Giles ejaculated.

The blue creature shivered and stretched its arm still further forward.

Giles climbed in and started the car, his eyes on Grizzle. As he neared the street, the foreward-pointing arm swung abruptly tc the right. Giles obeyed, his heart pounding.

Follow the signs!

THEY were near the Common when Giles began to guess where they were going. As they neared Sewall Court, Grizzle raised its foreward-pointing arm as if to say, "Go slow," and then suddenly pointed downward as if for "Stop."

Fred, the CAMZ garageman, came up to the window. He was looking at the hood. Then, "Take her for you, Mr. Wardwell?" They traded places. As Giles was walking away, "Mr. Wardwell!" Fred called excitedly. Giles turned back. "I'd have sworn," Fred said from behind the wheel, "that you'd put a blue radiator ornament on your car, a sort of wild dinosaur. But now it's gone."

Giles said, a bit stuffily, "Blue? Wild? Now, Fred, would anyone be apt to do a thing like that to his car, in Boston?"

Inside the lobby Grizzle was playing unseen around the feet of George, the night guard and elevator-man. Giles kept his eyes away from the familiar.

"Fifth floor, Mr. Wardwell?" George volunteered. "All our big ones are up there." He stared at Giles' pyjama top under his coat. "They sure pulled you out of bed in a hurry, Mr. Wardwell. Must be something real emergency, though I haven't taken up any army men."

Giles maintained a dignified mysterious silence.

On the fifth floor the drapes were drawn tight behind the heavy glass wall of the main office. A little light shone through the drapes toward one end, not much. As the elevator door closed, Giles headed down the hall toward the office he shared, but there was a tug at his trouser leg. Grizzle led him to Mr. Arbuthnot's office, which was next to the end of the main office away from the light.



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Arbuthnot's office was empty and dark, but the door from it to the main office was open. Giles walked to it and stopped.

Mr. Copps, Mr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Mather, and Mr. Zim were all standing toward the other end of the main office, looking very serious and dignified and business-like in their dark suits, except that Mr. Zim was holding a small golden wand and wearing a tall conical black hat covered with golden stars and moons, and Mr. Arbuthnot was cradling in his arms a submachinegun.

And Joan was there, facing Giles' end of the office, the single light glaring full in her face. She was sitting up straight and defiant-faced on a stool with her arms stretched out straight to either side of her by thin white ropes anchored to filing cabinets.

She was wearing her red nightgown. A bit of Giles' mind jumped back to 1692 Salem, where Bridget Bishop had worn "a red paragon bodice" before her grim sober judges.

JOAN flirted her black hair away from her eyes with a shake of her head and said loudly, "But this is ridiculous, I keep telling you. My husband has never told me a word about the Second Missiles Project. I have no Communist connections. Presumably I was cleared by the F.B.I. at the same time Giles was. The rest is nonsense—or insanity."

"Must I take you over that ground again?" Mr. Mather said in his soft voice that was so clear and far-carrying. "Mrs. Wardwell, America has older and more formidable enemies than Communism. Unfortunately, the F.B.I. does not clear for witchcraft. But CAMZ, which embodies the finest traditions of Old New England, does. And somehow advertising is more sensitive to the occult than is the military." He tapped a sheaf of papers in his hand. "Confess yourself a witch, Joan Wardwell, tell where and how you bound yourself to Satan, detail for us your spells and magics, above all name the other witches of your coven —or you will force us to prove these facts upon your body! Mr. Copps, is the needle ready?"

"You can't make me testify against myself," Joan countered. "I plead the Fifth Amendment!"

"*Our* Massachusetts never ratified it," Mr. Mather told her. "Remember what happened to Giles Cory, Mr. Copps?"

Giles surged forward, then stopped. Four men and a submachinegun! His hands turned icy cold. Then something hot stroked his cheek, his face turned as cold as if a mask of ice had been slipped over it, and he almost shrieked.

Grizzle had climbed the front



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of his suit, was clinging to his left lapel as a sailor might to a sail, and had just finished licking his cheek with his long black tongue.

Mr. Arbuthnot turned and stared straight at the door of his office, leveling the gun. Giles froze, hoping the gloom would hide him though afraid his white hands and face were bound to stand out. But after a searching glance, Arbuthnot turned back toward Joan.

Mr. Mather was saying, "Joan Bishop Wardwell, consider well the helplessness of your situation. Your poor foolish husband, deceived by the note you wrote at our hypnotic dictation when we summoned you, believes you have deserted him. Your sister witches, who and wherever they may be, are held in check by Mr. Zim's helpful little spells. Confess yourself, redeem your wickedness, salvage what you can of the good American girl who yielded to the blandishments of Satan."

"I won't!" Joan cried ringingly. "Compared to your brand of Americanism, witchcraft is the soul of decency."

"The needle!"

Grizzle, still clinging to Giles with hind claws and one forepaw, tweaked Giles' arm painfully with the other, then pointed commandingly at Arbuthnot.

Follow the signs!

GOING behind Joan, Mr. Copps ripped her nightgown down the back and poised something that was glittering, long, and terribly slim.

Giles walked out into the main office, raising his right hand and pointing straight at Mr. Arbuthnot—though he almost dropped it when he saw that his hand was no longer flesh-colored but dead black.

Arbuthnot froze in mid-whirl. His flesh turned a faint gray. The submachinegun thudded on the thick-piled carpet.

The finger with which Giles had pointed at him was flesh-colored again and the rest of his hand was no longer dead black but charcoal gray.

Successively, copying Grizzle's gestures, Giles pointed his second finger, ring finger, and thumb at Mr. Zim, Mr. Copps, and Mr. Mather.

With each pointing, the man indicated froze and faintly grayed, while Giles' flesh lightened by stages until at the end he was no darker than they were.

For once in his life Giles Wardwell was seething with anger.

"You persecuting, smug, self-satisfied, hypocritical fiends!" he shouted. "You're worse than the Russians with your brainwashing. Now listen to me—you're going to forget this witchhunting obsession forever, I command



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it! *Silentium, silentium, mutus, mutus, mutus.* I'm letting you off easy—if you'd actually injured my wife, I'd make you really suffer. But believe me, after this you're never going to browbeat me, any of you. And I'm going to start playing chess again and seeing my mother as often as I please!"

He stopped because Joan was laughing delightedly.

"Darling, they can't hear you," she called to him happily. "The Black Man's spell works a lot faster than barbiturates. For hours at least they'll be dead asleep. Now cut me loose and let's get out of here. I think your charm's certain to work, but to make sure we'll take Mr. Mather's papers and Mr. Zim's wand and cap and Mr. Arbuthnot's submachinegun and drop them in the Charles. You've got your little finger to put the night guard asleep and your left hand for emergencies. Is that Grizzle? He's a dear!"

A HALF hour later they were driving slowly home through Back Bay. Joan sat close to Giles, her head resting on his shoulder. Grizzle was curled on Joan's shoulder, holding her ripped red nightgown together with his hind claws. The car's heater flooded them with pleasant warmth.

"Giles," Joan said sleepily, "there's one more question I want to ask you. When you visited Margo and Alice and Mary today, did you find them . . . attractive?"

"Rather," he admitted. "I must say they're very weird women, but then it looks as if I'm going to have to get used to a great many extremely strange things. Pounce, for instance. Yes, to tell the truth I found all three girls quite attractive."

Joan nodded without opening her eyes. "I was afraid of that," she said. "You see, as Black Man of our little coven you will have certain duties and privileges. Oh well, I suppose I'll simply have to accept it."

Then, with a sleepy chuckle, she added, "But don't you forget, Giles Wardwell, now and forever, that I'm your First Witch."

THE END



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# *Special Effect*

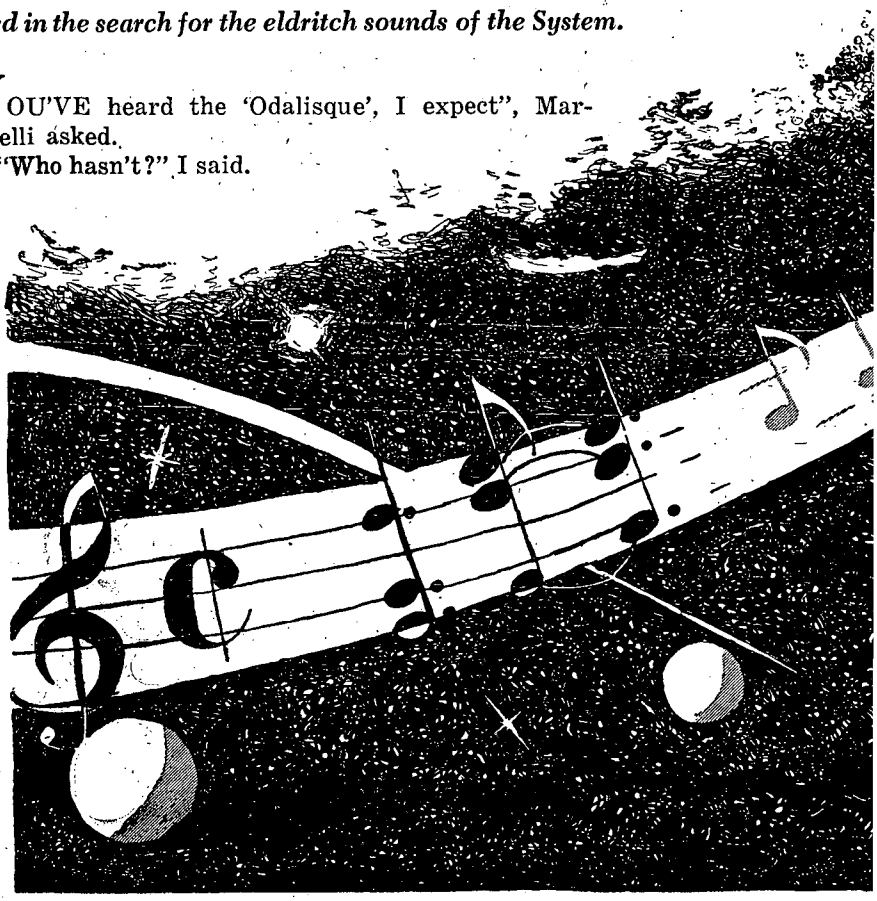
By J. F. BONE

Illustrator DOUGLAS

***Martinelli's passion was music. And before it was slaked men—and other beings—suffered, thrilled and died in the search for the eldritch sounds of the System.***

YOU'VE heard the 'Odalisque', I expect", Martinelli asked.

"Who hasn't?" I said.





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"Raposnikov at his best," he said, "and his best is very good indeed."

"There's no one like him, past or present," I enthused. "Nicolai Ilarionovich Raposnikov was the finest composer who ever lived. his handling of special effects alone would make him great but his intimate understanding of music, his feeling for balance and harmony, his exquisite employment of modern technology and ancient art to produce music that can be felt and sensed, as well as heard, why—there's never been a composer who could compare—" I sputtered, losing my eulogy in my enthusiasm.

You might gather from this outburst that I like music—and you'd be right—although to look at me you'd hardly figure it. Spacemen look like what they are—Muscle Beach boys with a prison pallor. We're an anachronism on an Earth welded to the twenty-hour week and balanced caloric diets. Compared to the slim bronzed groundlings, we sailors stand out like Charolais bulls in a herd of Angus heifers. Some of us try Mantan to blend in with the general background but we never manage to make it. Our eyes give us away. You can't spend months on end looking for trouble without developing a certain restlessness of the eyeballs that refuses to let one's vision linger too long upon any one object; "Dancing Eyes" the groundlings call us. They give us our character and part of our reputation. We're the last of the pioneers, our direct ancestors are the sailors, the conquistadores and the mountain men who opened up the western hemisphere back in the Dark Ages. In short, we're romantic hellers.

The only trouble, as far as I'm concerned, is that I don't want to be a romantic heller. Sure—I like women—but I'd rather spend an evening at Berlino's eating a good steak than taking a two-minute break at a Calorie Counter. I'd rather sit in Carnegie Hall listening to good music than sweating at Roseland dancing to squirm. And while it's fun to kiss a girl goodnight, I have no desire to have her cluttering up my apartment until the following morning. As far as I'm concerned, I'd rather live back in those quiet days of the middle Twentieth Century than in these hectic ones of the middle Twenty-second.

I sighed and let my gaze flicker over the dark man who sat across the table from me. His name was Olaf Martinelli and he was a conductor. He'd been on the podium at Carnegie several times when I was in the audience. He wasn't bad—at times he was even great, but he had a poor reputation in music circles. He was a glory-grabber, a ty-



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rant, a disciplinarian of the old Toscanini school, and about as trustworthy as a Venerian swamp sucker on a hot day. I didn't like him by reputation, and his personality wasn't much better. He was too dark, too tall, too smooth and too well informed about my habits. He had looked me up, run me down, and cornered me in Eddie's Bar where I occasionally stop for a drink. He'd been thoroughly briefed, except that he didn't know I distrusted tall, smooth characters, and that I have no faith in artists as businessmen. Any day I'd rather take a chance with a hard-headed contractor than an artist. Painters, actors, musicians—they're all alike, people who usually have their feet firmly planted on a cloud. Once I was soft enough to freight an entire musical comedy group to Mars which was a mistake since the company went broke and I couldn't sell their contracts for beans. Bad artists are a glut on the Martian market, and I wasn't about to get in another jam like that. By sticking to regular business I manage to run a fairly profitable operation. I own the "Virgin Queen" and I intend to keep on owning her. I'm not eager to take on speculation charters or cargo. Let the guys who are riding high do that! Small operators like me have to stick to hard cash and let the big chances go by. We never make millions but we stay alive and do what we like to do—which is travelling the spacelanes.

MARTINELLI, however, had a proposition. He leaned forward across the table and tried to hold my shifting blue eyes with his protuberant brown ones. "You're just the man I've been looking for," he said. "A spaceman who appreciates good music. You're a rarity, my friend, a rarity."

"What's so odd about liking music?"

His eyebrows rose. "Have you ever considered the statistical improbability of finding an independent spacer who understands and appreciates Beethoven, Tchaikowsky, Dvorak, Moussorgsky, Sibelius, Taylor, Shostakovich, Callendar, and Rostanzo?"

"Not to mention a few others," I added helpfully.

He nodded. "Actually, Captain Lundfors, you're unique. And you're precisely the man I have been looking for."

"How's that?"

"Would you like to charter your ship for a year's cruise?"

I gulped. A year's charter would get my pint-sized operation solidly on its feet. I could buy some needed tube liners and insulation. I could have the "Virgin Queen" drydocked and thor-



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oughly overhauled. I could clean up the back-pay accounts of my crew. I could buy myself a new uniform to replace the threadbare grays I was now wearing. A year's charter would be a dream.

"It would cost you plenty," I said.

"How much?"

"Two million credits."

Martinelli winced. "What does that rocket of yours run on—gold?" he asked.

"Plutonium. It's more expensive."

"I didn't realize these things cost so much," Martinelli's voice was flat. "I don't think I can afford it."

"I might be able to shave the costs a little," I said dubiously, "but a year's cruise can be damned expensive. It depends on where you want to go. Incidentally, where *do* you want to go?"

"Hmm—let's see—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Titan, Io, Callisto, Ganymede, and—oh yes—Pluto."

"All the inhabited worlds in the system!" I said. "Why?"

"I'll tell you that if we can come to terms," Martinelli said. "Until then, that's my secret."

"We can dicker," I said, "but it won't be much less than two million—not with an itinerary like that. Or do you realize that it will take you nine months of that year just to travel to those places? Pluto's a long way out, and Mercury's pretty close to the sun. Frankly, it's a cheap price."

He shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "I'm not a poor man but that's pretty steep."

"Tell you what we can do," I offered helpfully. "After we check your credit rating, we can go down to Univac Center and put the problem up to the computers." Actually I'd do that anyway before I ever made a smoothie like Martinelli a firm offer. "We'll figure it as cost of operation plus ten percent. That ought to be fair enough. You lay out the itinerary and I'll insert the Queen's latest operating data. We add ten percent to that, and if you're willing to go on from there, I'm your man."

"That sounds fair enough," Martinelli said.

"Of course," I added, "there'll be the usual demurrage, port charges, change of destination clauses, *and* an Act of God clause included in the contract."

Martinelli looked at me with a faint light of respect in his bulging brown eyes. "You don't miss a bet, do you?" he asked.

"I've been dealing with contractors for twenty years," I said drily.

He laughed, and I chuckled with him.

"I'll file our contract in Public Archives," he said, "providing we agree on one. Some day it'll be a historical document."



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It was my turn to laugh. "Do you think they'll accept it?" I asked. "What sort of business would make a freighter's contract a public record?"

"Wait," Martinelli said.

I shrugged.

THE basic figure Univac gave us was two million, one hundred and thirty thousand, five hundred and twenty-seven credits. Martinelli whistled with dismay. "I should have taken your original offer."

"It wasn't firm," I reminded him, thinking as I did that computers were almost as easy to fool as conductors. With new tube liners in the "Queen" I could shave half a million off that figure. But Univac didn't know that. It had to work upon the data I had given it, and new high performance tube liners weren't included in that data. For two hundred thousand I could have the "Queen" docked, relined and refitted. I would be getting the equivalent of a new ship and nearly three hundred kilocredits to boot.

"The other figures I've checked were all about the same as yours," Martinelli said glumly, "except for IPC. That bunch wanted three million."

"Interplanetary has newer and faster ships," I said. "And, besides, they're a big outfit."

"I don't need a big outfit," Martinelli replied. "Yours will do nicely. Now let's go up to my office. We'll have a law firm make up the contract. And then I'll tell you what I want you to do."

"You won't mind if I select the lawyers?" I asked.

He shook his head. "You can hire the Attorney General if you wish." He sounded indifferent.

"Akers, Callahan, Weintraub, and Kabele'll do well enough," I said. "They've handled my freight contracts for the past decade."

"They're a good firm," he agreed. "I've done business with them once or twice on tour contracts."

I looked at my copy of the contract and nodded. As far as I could see it was fair enough. It had the usual penalty clauses for nonperformance, but essentially it was a standard freight contract. I agreed to deliver Brother Martinelli and such equipment as he would bring with him to the eight inhabited worlds of the Solar Union. The order in which the worlds were to be visited was at my discretion. The only bad feature was the time element. One year was all I had to complete the trip. And that wasn't too much time. One minor accident, one bad touchdown, could ruin me. But I had fulfilled worse contracts than this one and I had no cause for com-



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plaint. I knew the "Queen" inside out and was perfectly aware of what she could and could not do. This job she could handle.

"All right," I said. "Now what are we making this trip for?"

"To collect sounds," Martinelli said.

"Sounds?"

"Remember we were talking about Raposnikov?"

I nodded.

"You'd really have to know the man to appreciate this, but Nicolai Ilarionovitch was a Unionist all his adult life—and when the Solar Union was established, he decided to write a symphony honoring it. He finished it just before he died last year. It is his master work, his greatest production, the piece toward which his entire life was directed. It's called the "Nine Worlds Symphony" and is dedicated to the Solar Union." Martinelli looked at me, his brown eyes glittering. "It's probably the most valuable single piece of property in existence today," he said. "And I own it on condition that I present the entire score *exactly as it was written* in its debut on the tenth anniversary of the Union. And that date is a year and a half away."

"Then why are you hiring a space ship?" I asked. "It seems to me that you'd be hiring a symphony orchestra."

"It's not that easy," Martinelli said. "You see, Raposnikov took a leaf out of Tchaikovski's book, only he went one step farther."

"Tchaikovski?"

"Remember the 1812 Festival Overture?"

I nodded. "The one with the special effects?" I asked. "The cannon, the Moscow bells, and the brass band?"

"That's the one. Well—Raposnikov out-Tchaikovskied Tchaikovski. His piece calls for a steam hammer working a steel ingot, a Dixieland Jazz Band, a spaceship taking off, the sound of the lava flows on Mercury's twilight zone, the bellow of a Venerean swamp sucker, the temple bells at K'vasteh, the Corens' warcry, the nesting call of a flock of Ionion Kalliks, Callistan whistlers, a hegemon, and a Plutonian ice fall. Oh, yes, and the sound of a hulled spaceship."

"That's quite a mess of sound," I said. "I've been on the spacelanes for twenty years, and I've yet to hear a Callistan whistler or a Kallik's nesting call. Never was on any of the outer worlds except Ganymede, but you should have no trouble there. A hegemon's easy to dicker with. For that matter, I've only heard a swampsucker just once—and, frankly, I don't want to hear one again. Those subsonics play hell with the nervous system."

"I tried to get the sounds from the Solar Union Academy," Mar-



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tinelli went on, "but they're not recorded. You'd think they would be", he added aggrievedly. "It just goes to show that when you want something out of a museum you can't get it. They've got plenty of stuffed Kalliks, and whistlers, and even a stuffed swamp sucker, but not a single sound." He shrugged. "And since the contract states that original sounds must be furnished, I'm stuck with an exploring job."

"How much is the Academy offering for a copy of your soundtrack?" I asked.

Martinelli smiled wryly. "Not much, just the technicians, professional guides, and the recording apparatus."

"That should be quite a saving."

"It would be except for one thing. I have to pay them for every soundtrack over five, and I'm not sure they'll record the proper key and pitch I'll need to fit into the symphony."

I shook my head. Martinelli had a job ahead. I wondered why he took it, and said so.

"You haven't heard the "Nine Worlds", Martinelli said, "otherwise you wouldn't ask. You want to hear it?"

I nodded. Raposnikov is one of my favorite composers.

MARTINELLI opened his desk safe and took out a roll of recording tape. "I had this made in sections," he said, "so no one would be able to copy the theme. Some of the sounds are in already—the first movement is complete; so you can get an idea what the finished piece will be like." He pressed a button and a panel on top of his desk slid aside to reveal a modern stereo—one of those fancy jobs with acoustical depth. He threaded the tape and placed his finger on the starter button.

"The first movement", Martinelli said quietly, "deals with man's conquest of space. Unlike Dvorak's "New World" the shape of the main subject is introduced directly. There is no hinting, no intimation of things to come. It is more like Beethoven's Fifth—a direct, demanding introduction that draws the listener bodily into the vigorous *Allegro molto* with its hypnotic repetitive rhythm. The theme is advanced by a transition that is actually a subsidiary theme in F-minor played first by the flutes and oboes and picked up by the other woodwinds and strings. The second main theme is carried by the brasses in G-major, starting with a muted trumpet playing an unmistakeable derivation of Rosinski's "Space and the Atom". The harsh, almost militaristic note is augmented by the brasses, modified by the woodwinds and swept to a glittering



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crescendo by the strings and kettle drums, culminating in the hissing roar of a space-ship's jet with their supersonic overtones that are almost painful—listen!" He pressed the button.

I was relaxed, soothed by Martinelli's summation, and utterly unprepared for the violent opening as the full orchestration of over two hundred pieces hammered at my eardrums. It was a blockbuster opening, something that would have made Beethoven turn green with envy. It was Raposnikov all right, but a Raposnikov I had never heard nor dreamed of hearing. The music picked me up, hurled me into a world of sound and fury, of men and metal and dreams turned into steel and atomics. It was pure sensation—music that made me want to laugh and weep, to swell with pride, to suffer the heartbreak of failure and to feel the grim determination that next time—next time we would succeed. For a few minutes, I was a part of all mankind who ever dreamed of the stars. My chest hurt, my brain throbbed, and cold involuntary chills ran down my spine. My legs trembled, and tears actually came to my eyes at the termination when man finally achieved his ancient dream and left earth for those glittering witch lights in the heavens. The sounds, as Martinelli called them, were an integral part of the theme. Their presence was essential. From steam hammer to jetblast, the sounds were a part of the music, complementing it, augmenting it, making the whole movement the vital, living, striving thing it had to be.

Martinelli stopped the tape, and I relaxed, shivering with reaction.

"My God!" I said weakly. "I thought I had heard them all, but this is incredible!"

"See what I mean," Martinelli said. "This is the greatest thing that man has done in music. Ownership of this score is literally worth millions. And I own it if I can reproduce it precisely as Raposnikov wrote it. Do you wonder why I am willing to spend over two million chartering your ship?"

"No," I said. "And if the rest of that symphony is like the beginning, I'd almost be willing to donate the 'Queen' to help you pull it off." I was drunk with sensation. Never in my life had I heard such music.

"Almost," Martinelli chuckled, "but not quite—eh?"

I sighed, shrugged, and stood up. "A man must live," I said, "and space is my life and the 'Queen' my home. There are things like fuel, repairs, wages and dockage charges. Those cost money and, unfortunately, I'm not a rich man."

"But you love music," Marti-



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nelli said, "so you will be eager to help me."

"That's about it," I said.

"And that is all I will need to make this debut a success," Martinelli said. "I thank you, Captain Lundfors." He held out his hand.

I gripped it. It was I who should be thanking him, I thought. He had given me a taste of glory.

A WEEK later the "Virgin Queen" was ready for blastoff. Port Maintenance had completed a man-killing crash program in record time, and the "Queen" was as tight and true as the day she left the ways. For the first time in years everything aboard the old girl worked as it should. I collected my crew from the fleshpots of New York and Westchester, herding the grumbling spacemen aboard like a father loading his children into the family car at the end of vacation. Three weeks liberty on full pay and the men still complained. They hadn't had it so good in years but they wanted more. Of course they didn't get it, since a contract is a contract, and a spaceship captain is God Almighty as far as his crew is concerned.

About the only man who looked happy about coming back was Egon Bernstein, my executive officer. Bernie was old enough to appreciate space. The rest—mostly four-year men—were hardly dry behind the ears. I wasn't too happy with them, but with the major spacelines giving two year contracts and bonuses to experienced men with six or more years of service, an independent freighter has to take what's left and be thankful it is no worse.

The Solar Union boys—five of them—arrived with a truckload of sound equipment which they supervised like mother hens guarding chicks. They stored their equipment with meticulous care, took their shockcouch assignments, and fitted into the ship's routine with the ease of professional space travellers.

Martinelli and two heavy-shouldered men showed up with another pile of gear which we stowed. We took on last minute supplies, extra fuel slugs for our reactor, and topped off the chemical tanks with nitric and hydrazine. I checked the stations from the control chair, got the all clear signal from the tower, and blasted off.

Outside the atmosphere shell of Earth I cut the chemicals and switched on the atomics. A pale blue glow spurted from the drive tubes as we began to pile on velocity for the long trip to Pluto. I had checked our possible courses at Port Astrogation and had finally decided that the rela-



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tive positions of the planets were such that the outer worlds offered the best positional relationships—and when we had finished with them, the inner worlds would be in good juxtaposition if we could keep to the schedule I had planned.

The outward trip was fortunate. We picked up a thumb-sized meteorite as we crossed the asteroid belt and the crash and hiss of escaping air were satisfactorily recorded by the Solar Union men. I gave them plenty of warning to get set up and although I could have used the screens to deflect the tiny chunk of metal, I figured that if we could get a meteor strike recording this early in the game we were all to the good.

Damage control quickly repaired the leak as the sound men checked their tapes with Martinelli.

"Did you know your hull rings in F-sharp?" Martinelli asked me as he came into the control room during the first watch after the collision. He had gotten over his space sickness quickly and was continuously active—nosing through the ship, asking questions of the crew, Bernie, and myself, and behaving like a rubber-necking tourist. In a way it was laughable, but somehow I couldn't laugh at Martinelli. The man was too intense, too serious to be a comic figure.

"Is that good?" I asked.

"It's perfect. That passage was written in F-sharp. We won't need to try again or make tonal adjustments. We have a recording that'll turn the public's hair when we use it. It's great! And that young crewman yelling "Meteor strike!"—that was the convincing touch."

"You mean Nalton?" I asked.

"Yes, that's his name."

"He's young," I said, "young and pretty green. Making a planet out of an asteroid. He should have kept his mouth shut. But maybe its a good omen. When a goofur turns out all right that's a good sign."

"I never thought you were superstitious," Martinelli said.

"All spacemen are superstitious," I replied. "I guess it's because space is so big and we're so small."

"When are we due to hit Pluto?" he asked.

"If we've laid the course right—in about two months."

"Long time."

"Long distance—Pluto isn't just next door."

"I realized that, but I didn't realize what it'd be like cooped up in here with only a thin metal skin between us and space. Frankly, that meteorite scared me."

I grinned. "I didn't feel so good either—and we almost took it in the screen control which



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would really have made things sticky. Without screens we'd be in bad shape."

"Would it be that serious?" he asked worriedly.

I smiled without humor. "We finished one run from Mars to Earth without screens," I said, "and we ran out of patches. There were one hundred and thirty-seven holes in the 'Queen's" skin. We looked like a sieve, finished the trip in space suits, and had two casualties."

He shuddered. "I hope the screens hold this time."

"They will," I assured him. "The generators have been completely rebuilt."

I WISH Nicolai Ilarionovitch had a better understanding of the technical details of sound transmission," Martinelli said bitterly as we stood on Pluto's icy surface and surveyed the frozen desolation about us. "Just how are we going to record an ice fall on a world without atmosphere?"

"There's plenty of atmosphere," I replied as I scuffed the blue-white dust underfoot with an insulated space boot. "The only trouble is that it's all frozen,—liquid helium, solid oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide. What would you expect on a world three and a half billion miles from the sun?" I was angry with myself. I should have realized that Pluto's solid and semi-solid atmosphere was incapable of transmitting audible sound. We had our two and a half month trip for nothing.

All about us were the giant glaciers that covered Pluto's surface, knife sharp jagged blocks of ice rising hundreds of feet into the air, cold and black under the faint light of the stars and the tiny disc of the sun low on the horizon. The radome of Pluto Station bulged darkly behind us and a little to one side were the clustered spikes of the station spaceships and the bulkier mass of the "Queen" standing on her landing pads.

Far below our feet in tunnels and corridors carved from the endless ice, the men and women of Pluto Station went about their daily tasks—adaptable as only humans can be—carving a life and living out of the frozen crust of the iceworld.

"Obviously Raposnikov was thinking of the icefall of '98," I said. "The one in the main lateral of the old station. There was air down there—and there was undoubtedly sound."

"That could be it," Martinelli agreed. "Let's go below. It's getting cold up here."

I had to agree with him. Despite the insulation and heating elements of our spacesuits the frightful cold of Pluto was seeping through my boots and the



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joints of my armor. I turned toward the station's airlock, the chilled joints of my armor somewhat stiffer than normal, and as I turned I cast one flickering glance around the horizon. It was purely habit—the trained eye reflex of a spaceman, but in that brief glance my vision caught an abnormality. One of the tall ice spires above us was distinctly wrong. No longer vertical the tall black tower was leaning outward, toppling with silent ponderous deliberation.

"Icefall!" I yelled. "Run!"

Martinelli's reflexes were as fast as my own. He cast one lightning glance upward and then broke into a clumsy run for the steel and cryoplastic revetment that guarded the station entrance. I pounded along behind him. In Pluto's light gravity we made surprisingly good time despite the armor that encased us. As we dove for the shelter of the revetment, the airless sky of Pluto was filled with hurtling shards of ice as the pinnacle struck and shattered. One small piece struck me in the ribs while another ricocheted off Martinelli's helmet. Two years ago he'd have been a dead man breathing space through a shattered helmet, but the ice shard merely glanced off the tough cryoplastic without doing any harm.

Well—almost no harm. Martinelli was scared to death, but that was all. Apparently he had read some of the old stories about what happened when something hit a helmet.

"You're O.K." I assured him as I lifted him to his feet.

"My helmet?"

"New model," I grunted. "They don't shatter nowadays."

"Thank God! For a minute I thought I'd had it," Martinelli said. His voice was unsteady. "I don't want to die—at least not until I've produced the 'Nine Worlds'."

"My personal opinion is that all conductors are born to be hung, so you're safe until you get back to Earth."

"Not funny," Martinelli said, but he chuckled just the same. Occasionally it takes a bit of graveyard humor to draw the iron out of hiding. He was all right now. "You know, it's too bad that Pluto has no free air. That could have been a wonderful sound."

"The only sound I want to hear right now is the bubbling of a coffee pot," I replied.

"You have a point there," he said, as he helped me open the small airlock.

WE CHECKED with Herb Hallowell, the station superintendent, about the possibility of air remaining in the old station.



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"The Old Station?—Hmm. I don't know. We abandoned that place nearly fifty years ago. Why do you want to go there?"

"I don't," I said, "but Mr. Martinelli does."

"I want to record an icefall," Martinelli said. "And since there's no atmosphere outside—".

"There's no sound," Hallowell interrupted. "But why do you want to record an icefall?"

"I think I'd better explain," Martinelli said. "In a year and a quarter, Earth time, the Solar Union centennial is going to occur and we're going all out to make it one of the greatest shows Earth has ever seen. Part of the program is a sound recording of typical noises of the nine inhabited worlds, and an icefall is typical of Pluto."

Hallowell grimaced. "It's typical all right. Well—you can visit the Old Station if you wish but I won't be responsible for your safety."

"Is there an atmosphere?" Martinelli asked.

"There was the last time anyone visited the place."

"When was that?"

"Five years ago."

"Hmm—that means there's probably some left."

"There should be. Ice is pretty good insulation."

We left for the Old Station the next day. Five of us,—Martinelli, myself, Nalton, and the two heavy-shouldered apelike men Martinelli had brought along from Earth. Their names were Anderson and Bellini—which had become shortened naturally to Mr. A. and Mr. B., and finally to Able and Baker, during the long trip out to Pluto. Although most of the crew understood the inference, I'm sure that neither Able nor Baker did. It was one of those sly spacemen insults that often resulted in broken skulls when the victim realized what it meant, but in this case I doubted if it would. The simian resemblance of Able and Baker extended to their mental capacity if not to their sex. They were a pair of good-natured brutes, capable of shaking your hand or cutting your throat with the same friendly smile on their face. Martinelli called them guides, but goons would probably have been more accurate. Able had prospected on Titan and Baker was a Venerean swamprat, but neither of them had any experience on Pluto. Still, their muscles were handy for lugging heavy equipment, and we could use them.

We took along some of the high-priced recording equipment to get the sound of an icefall if an audible one could be made available, and a few explosive charges to make one available if nature wouldn't cooperate.



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The Solar Union men refused to come unless Martinelli paid them, and Martinelli refused to pay for such a simple thing as this sort of recording. They were within their rights. Pluto wasn't included on their agenda but I couldn't blame Martinelli. After all, a technician's pay on a hazardous mission isn't peanuts and Martinelli had already laid out quite a bit of change for this trip. So we left them behind to enjoy the warm comfort of Pluto Station while we did the work.

The station rolligon carried us to the old airlock of Station One. The antique double lock was still functioning, and the dials on our spacesuits indicated a two-thirds Earth normal atmosphere inside. They didn't indicate that the air was breathable, and we weren't about to take any chances since we had twenty hours' supply in our tanks. I had brought Nalton along to help us. The youngster was the only one of us who had more than a speaking acquaintance with explosives. He had taken a course in field demolitions and derelict removal at the Space Academy and planned to start his own business as a spacelane contractor in the asteroid belt as soon as he finished his course in practical spacemanship on the "Queen". Nalton was a nice kid—the cleancut Academy type that look as though they had been stamped out of a mold labelled "Made in Alamogordo". But some of that Academy veneer was wearing off. He had a sense of humor, a quick wit, and a quick tongue. He learned fast and was well liked. Some day he'd be a first class spaceman. But it was his knowledge of explosives that made him a member of the party.

Inside, the supports holding the ice roof were warped and twisted from the slow flowing of the ice, and the broad tunnel into the depths that had once been straight was now crooked and bent. Our lights cast beams of brightness ahead of us as we cautiously made our way downward to what had once been the entrance hall from which passages had radiated outward to the various working and living levels. The hall was barely two-thirds its former size, its walls oddly twisted and warped. It looked fragile and unstable. Many of the supporting girders were buckled and useless. A great pile of broken ice lay on the floor, evidence of an icefall that could have happened years —or minutes—ago.

Martinelli looked up at the jagged ceiling some ten meters overhead. "This will do," he said. "There's plenty of free drop here to get the crash and rattle that will be necessary. We can plant the microphone in the entrance and bury a couple of small



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charges under that bent pillar in the center of the room and see what happens when we touch them off."

"Nalton," I said.

"Yes, sir."

"You're the demolitions man. What'll happen if we crack that pillar?"

Nalton looked upward. "It'll probably bring the whole roof down," he said. "That hunk of duralloy is supporting about half the load on the center of the ceiling."

"How much plastic do you figure's necessary for the job?"

"About four hundred grams, sir. I wouldn't care to use any less."

"Well—get about it," I said, "and be careful. In air as cold as this, plastic's tricky stuff so I've been told."

"I know, sir," the youngster said. "That's why I've been keeping it in a thermo bag. It should be hot enough to mold easily."

"Okay, it's your baby. Get the charge placed. I'll run the detonator wires back to the entrance. When you're through, come up and join us. Then we'll set it off. Martinelli and his two monkeys'll handle the sound recording."

Nalton grinned, and I hoped that Able and Baker didn't get the drift—but it was hardly probable that they would. I dropped the end of the wire beside Nalton and slowly climbed the long corridor to the surface, paying out carefully and doing my best to avoid the leads Martinelli had run from his microphones. When I arrived at the airlock, the three of them had already set up the recorder and had the tape running.

MARTINELLI looked up at me. "Thought I'd better get this going just in case," he announced cheerfully.

"Just in case of what?"

"You never know. That hall looked pretty fragile to me. That ceiling could come down any minute."

"Nice cheerful guy, aren't you?" I asked. "Or do you know Nalton's down there?"

"I know and it worries me, but this is the only place we'll get an audible icefall on this crazy world. There's no sense in missing anything."

As though in answer the needles on the recorder jumped clear across the dial faces and a shudder rippled upward through the ice.

"Icefall!" Martinelli yelped.

"Nalton!" I shouted—and started down the passageway. A blast of frigid air swept up out of the depths and a whole section of passage in front of me buckled, twisted, and with horrid deliberation broke into huge blocks and shards that filled the pas-



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sage with flying daggers! I stumbled back. There was sound this time, rumbling, grinding sound as millions of tons of ice shuddered, shifted, and crushed together. The shockwave from the icequake knocked me to my knees. Blind with panic I turned and crawled back to the airlock as shock after shock rippled through the cracked and shattered ice. Martinelli and the others were already standing outside, numbed by the violence of the quake, uncertain whether to run or stand still. The rolligon had been tossed nearly two meters from where we had parked it, and stood rocking back and forth on its flotons as the tremors passed with steadily decreasing intensity as the shifting ice obliterated the last trace of Old Station—and spaceman second class Tamashiro Nalton.

I felt numb. Five minutes ago Nalton was alive—a nice kid with a sense of humor and a future. Now—my mind recoiled from the thought of what those millions of tons of shifting ice had done to him.

Martinelli, Able and Baker looked at me. Martinelli's face was frozen in horror—the two goons merely looked stupid. But one thing I was thankful for, they weren't grinning. If they had so much as showed a tooth I think I'd have killed them. I liked Nalton. The boy was a morale lifter. We were all going to suffer from his loss.

"I hope you got your damned sound," I gritted as I faced Martinelli.

He shivered and a measure of sanity came back to his eyes. "Oh God!" he said. Sweat stood out on his high forehead. "Oh God!—I've never heard anything so horrible—and Nalton's screams!" He retched—something that no one should ever do in a spacesuit—and I could no longer see his face.

SOMEHOW I managed to get Able and Baker moving. We packed the recording apparatus, led Martinelli back to the rolligon and headed back to Pluto Station across the ice hills that separated the old from the new base. I let Martinelli stew in his own digestive juices. At the moment I could do nothing else—and perhaps even if I could I wouldn't. I couldn't help blaming him for Nalton's death, and every time I thought of that grinning cheerful kid I felt sick and angry—angry as much at myself as at Martinelli. I should never have let a man of mine go down into that death trap. Getting the sounds was Martinelli's business, not mine or my crew's. Next time—and all the rest of the times, he could damn well kill his own sloats.



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WE BLASTED off Pluto in a somber mood. Martinelli with his burned face, me with my guilt and resentment, the crew with their anger at the Solar Union technicians, and the technicians with their righteous air that was all the more sickening because it *was* right. They didn't have to go on that trip that killed Nalton. The "Queen" wasn't a happy ship as we hurtled sunward to intercept Saturn. Not even the fact that the recording of the icefall was better than Raposnikov could have wished helped very much. I couldn't listen to it. The scream torn from Nalton's throat just at the beginning was all I could take.

We orbited Saturn on schedule, and the sight of the great-ringed world spinning below us was as heartening to the crew as a shot of euphoral. You could feel their spirits rise as we drove in toward the rings, killing our speed to make a landing on Titan.

Like Pluto, Titan was an ice-world. Its surface temperature of minus 245 degrees centigrade was far too low to support unprotected human life, but it wasn't too low to support the Corens, those peculiar amorphous entities with their silicon-based organic structure and their incredible capacity to withstand cold. Like most of the sun's natural children that man had visited, the largest moon of Saturn supported life. Pluto, the captive planet with the eccentric orbit did not. Nor did Iapetus or the smaller airless satellites of Jupiter and Neptune. But Titan, with its atmosphere, was inhabited long before man came to share the world and plunder it of its natural resources of heavy metals. The Corens, semi-intelligent, partly civilized, and thoroughly unpleasant, had done their best to discourage immigration, and had succeeded remarkably well until the First Punitive Expedition reduced them to relative harmlessness.

They still attacked isolated prospectors now and then, but they stayed away from the domes where Earthmen worked and were present in numbers. They had learned their lesson and were no longer a menace. A nuisance, perhaps, but mankind was big enough to stand nuisances, and we had no intention of committing genocide upon the original inhabitants. We had no use for the frigid surface of their world. Our interests lay in what was under the surface—the uranium, the thorium, and the other heavy elements that powered Earth's atomic civilization. So there were probably as many Corens today as there were when the first prospectors arrived and they were still the



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wild, warlike, death-defying savages who would willingly sacrifice a hundred of their number to kill one human. The only difference between the modern Coren and his ancestors is that he doesn't care to commit fruitless suicide attacking domes and spaceships.

"Just how," I asked Martinelli, "do you expect to get a recording of a Coren warcry? They avoid us."

"Simple," Martinelli said. "We use a decoy."

"Who? Not one of my crew!"

"Certainly not. We use Anderson. He prospected out here and knows the ropes. We put him down in a prospect hole, furnish him with an electronic fence, a communicator and an automatic rifle and await developments."

"Does he know what you're planning for him?" I asked.

"Naturally. I hired him on contract for this job."

"But that's sending a man out to be murdered!"

"He did it before, with less hope of reward."

"But"—I shrugged and shut up. Anderson knew what he was doing—what chances he took.

"The greatest concentration of Corens, so I understand, is in the South Polar region," Martinelli said. "We'll land near there and break out one of the lifeboats. Anderson'll set out and find some Corens. He'll land about a day's march away and set up camp, using the lifeboat as a base, and when the Corens come he'll invite attack, record their warcry, and then come back here in the lifeboat. It's simple."

Yeah—simple. But Martinelli didn't know the Corens. He had no experience with their uncanny ability to camouflage themselves to look like natural rocks or siliceous vegetation. He didn't know their incredible ferocity or tenacity of life, or their equally incredible patience. Probably Anderson did, but the man was hardly more intelligent than a Coren. It would be all too easy for him to become a second casualty, and I wanted no more. One death on this voyage was enough. As captain, I was responsible for both crew and passengers and I had no desire to explain to an Admiralty Court why I allowed a passenger to expose himself to possible death. Actually, I couldn't stop him. Once on a planet my authority over passengers was nil, but I'd be the target of some pretty hard questioning if anything happened.

"We're going to tape this insane idea of yours into the ship's log," I said. "I want it on record that I'm opposed to this sort of thing and that it is your responsibility."

Martinelli shrugged. "As you wish," he said indifferently. "I'll



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have Anderson make a statement, too."

I sighed.

ANDERSON took off in the lifeboat shortly after we landed and completed the usual security precautions. After searing a hundred-yard wide area around the base of the ship with the rockets on idling, we strung an electronic fence and hooked it to one of the auxiliary generators. The gun turrets were opened and our heavy weapons were checked to see that they were in operating condition. After that, two groups of crewmen covered every square foot of the seared area blasting any suspicious bump or bulge on the ground. Then, and only then, did we break out a lifeboat, provision and equip it, and send Anderson on his way. As he disappeared southward, I had the feeling we would never see him again.

Half an hour later he reported in over the communicator. "Spotted about two hundred of the jellies—am circling them. Get a position fix."

Wagner, our astrogator, obligingly pinpointed him and gave him the data on his position.

"Will now fly about thirty miles away and find a landing site," Anderson said.

"Some navigator," Wagner said. "He doesn't even know his position." He flipped the transmitter switch. "Queen to Anderson. Will track you. Fly over your landing area until I pinpoint you."

"Okay, Queen." The transmitter stayed on as Anderson circled.

"You can set down now," Wagner said. "I have a fix."

"Thanks." Anderson's heavy voice was flat. "I'll contact you again as soon as I get my security up."

Regularly on the hour, Anderson reported. For the first 48-hour-period nothing happened. Then Anderson came on ahead of schedule.

"They're here!" Anderson's voice crackled over the phone. "I have about 20 new rocks in my front yard that weren't here yesterday. Looks like I'm going to have visitors." His voice was almost happy.

"Increase the charge on your fence," I ordered. "There's no sense in asking for trouble."

"I already have," Anderson said. "I know these jellies as well as you do."

"And keep your communicator open," I added. "You may not have an opportunity to open communication again. We'll stand by here."

"I'll do that—but there's no need to worry."

"Don't bet on that. The Corens are smart."

"Okay—but—" A wild eldritch



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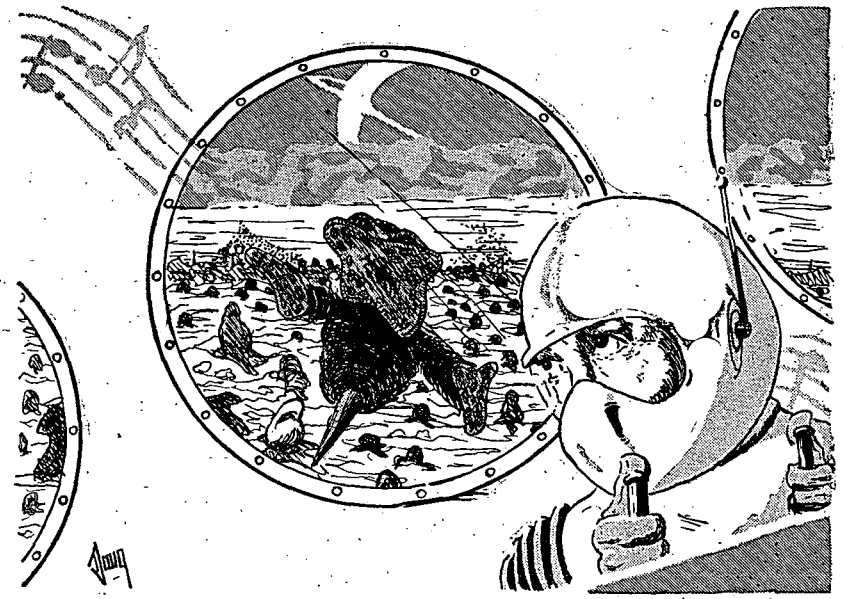

cry came faintly over the communicator.

"Well—that's it," Anderson said calmly. "They've decided to pay me a call. I'll blast a couple of them to get things stirred up. Tell Martinelli he'll probably get his warcry any minute now."

"Was that a Coren warcry?" Martinelli asked. He was leaning over my shoulder listening to our conversation.

"No," I said. "But keep your ear glued to this speaker and you'll hear one. That was just their way of talking to one another. They have a tonal language, not an inflected one. They make sounds by forcing air from their air bladders through their breathing tubes. The principle is something like that of a horn. When you hear their warcry, you'll recognize it." I grinned thinly. "You can't help it. It sounds like a traffic jam of homicidal maniacs on the Midcontinent Skyway."

Martinelli chuckled nervously.

I turned to the ship's annunciator. "Now hear this," I ordered. "Prepare for blastoff."

"Why?" Martinelli asked.

"We may have to help Anderson," I said. "He just might not have firepower enough to get out of there."

Sound erupted from the com-



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municator. It wasn't exactly discord, but it had a nerve grating quality that made the short hairs on the back of one's neck stand erect and icy prickles chase one another down one's spine. There were harsh undertones of menace, overtones of shrill hate, and a full-bodied middle range of detestation. I'd heard it before, but never so loud. It had the volume and some of the tonal quality of the brasses in an orchestra—a metallic diapason of rage and hatred. The sound swelled and throbbed inside the "Queen's" control room—and was suddenly punctuated by Anderson's horrified voice. "My God! There's thousands of them!"

"Get out of there!" I ordered. "That fence won't hold."

"I know," Anderson said, "they're all over the boat. They broke through the fence just like it wasn't there." His voice had become oddly calm. "I can't take off—they're weighting me down."

"Open the jets to full," I said. "Spin the ship. Shake them off!"

"I'll try—but you'd better get here quick. I don't think it'll work and this boat won't take much of that treatment."

"To hell with the boat," I said as I hit the emergency blastoff alarm. "It's your life I'm worried about."

"*You're* worried," Anderson said. "What do you think I am?"

Fifteen seconds later we were airborne—heading for the fix Wagner had taken on Anderson's position.

"If you can get here in another 20 minutes, I think I can hold out," Anderson's tight voice came over the communicator. The background noises of his jets and the grinding of metal against rock indicated that he was taking my advice. "I don't dare try to roll the boat over, but the jets are scorching enough of them to keep the pressure off. The hull's bulging a bit but I think it'll hold."

"We're on the way," I said. "Hang on."

"I haven't any—" the communicator went dead. One of the Corens had probably ripped off the antenna.

WE flashed across Titan's surface, travelling low and fast. I don't know how the crew felt, but I wanted to get to Anderson while he was still alive. The Corens were incredibly strong, and a lifeboat isn't too ruggedly built. All they had to do was spring one plate and Anderson was dead.

"He's just over that next range of hills, skipper," Wagner's voice came into my earphones.

I threw the "Queen" into a vertical attitude, balancing her on the jets as momentum carried



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us forward. It was a dangerous maneuver, but I needed the jetblast. It was the best weapon we had. Sweat poured off me as I balanced the ship on her drives, using the jet to kill our speed as we swept over the hills and into the valley beyond.

The entire floor of the bowl-shaped valley was crawling with Corens. The lifeboat was covered with them. As they sensed the "Queen" the gray blue blobs began splitting up and moving away with startling speed as they extruded limbs from their amorphous bodies and ran for safety. They had no desire to face a full-sized ship.

But those covering the lifeboat didn't run. They clung like limpets as we plowed stern first toward the seething mass of siliceous flesh, our tubes blasting fiery paths across the ground. Some of them died in the jetblast as I set the "Queen" down heavily in what was an arrival rather than a landing. Shock raced through the ship, slamming passengers and crew against safety webs and shock couches. For a moment we teetered dangerously as I stabbed at the steering jets, trying to keep us upright. Below me, the automatics in the three turrets that could be brought to bear began pouring low order solid and vibratory destruction into the Corens still covering the lifeboat while the fourth turret speeded the departure of those who were still within range in the valley.

The "Queen" shuddered and steadied in a vertical attitude as Bernstein, acting without orders, opened the engine room hatch and dropped to the ground followed by five men carrying flamethrowers. At the sight of this easier prey, the Corens swarming over Anderson's boat, dropped to the icy ground and came scuttling forward on their pseudolegs, trumpeting their warcry as they ran.

Bernie and his men met them with a wall of flame that crisped the foremost dozen into cinders. But the others came on. There weren't so many now, only twenty or so, but a Coren is twice the physical match of any human, and if one of those beasts got to close quarters it would be curtains. I swore insanely as I watched Bernie through the scanners, cold sweat running down my face. He had no business risking his life out there. Nor did those other five fools. He let them come to pointblank range and fired again. I yelled hoarsely as the yellow flames enveloped the front rank of the nearest jellies, and yelled again as the others turned and fled. They had enough. Fully two hundred of them were dead, and that price was too high even to their blood-soaked minds.



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The lifeboat was apparently intact as Bernie and his party walked cautiously toward it. I noticed for the first time that the men he was leading were the Solar Union people—and whatever feelings I had for their actions on Pluto vanished in admiration of their courage here on Titan. It took guts of the highest order to face a charging Coren.

Bernie opened the emergency airlock on the lifeboat and slammed it shut again as a thick grayish blue pseudolimb extruded sluggishly from the opening. The closing steel sliced through the jelly-like mass which dropped to the ground, extruded a half dozen pseudolimbs of its own and scuttled off across the gray landscape. I felt sick. We were too late. The Corens had managed to crack the lifeboat's hull.

We had a little trouble getting the Corens out of the boat without destroying the recording apparatus, but the exhaust fumes of a small gasoline engine finally did the trick. Oxygen breathers like ourselves, the Corens were equally susceptible to carbon monoxide.

We hooked them out of the interior, two three-foot pieplates of gray-blue meat, with a humped central area that held dozens of flat razor-edged siliceous spicules.

"They look like jellyfish," Martinelli observed as we flopped the limp amorphous masses onto the icy rocks.

"Maybe they do to you," I said, "but to me they represent something else."

"What?"

"Vampires."

Martinelli's eyebrows rose, but they didn't stay that way. Two of the Solar Union men came out of the lifeboat carrying something horribly slashed and deflated that had once been Anderson. The knifelike silicon spicules had reduced his space armor to ribbons at every flexible joint, and inside the armor, a shrunken mass of bones and slashed skin was all that was left. Virtually all the soft tissues of his body had been absorbed. And the greatest horror of all was that there was no blood.

"They're fond of men," I said bitterly, nudging one of the dead masses with an armored foot. "We're a delicacy."

Martinelli's face turned a pale green, but he didn't get sick. Experience on Pluto had taught him to keep better control over his stomach.

"Load the boat," I ordered. "We can repair her on the way. There's no use staying here—and there's no use bringing Anderson," I added.

We buried him under a cairn of ice and melted it into a solid



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mass with our needle beams, while Martinelli went back to the ship with the sound tapes and his weak stomach, and the crew connected the hoist cables to rings welded in the lifeboat's hull.

It didn't make me any happier to know that this recording was also perfect. Two lives for two noises seemed a pretty high price. Nor was Martinelli joyful.

"At this rate," he said bitterly, "we'll be landing on Earth with half our personnel missing."

"I know," I said, "and there's worse to come."

I was thinking of the swampsucker. That thing is almost legendary in stories of the exploration of the Solar Union. Of all creatures dreamed up by an insane Nature in a moment of homicidal madness, the Venerian swampsucker is the worst. That animal fitted into no known category of solar life. It was even a stranger to its equally weird fellows on the Cloudy Planet. They, at least, had some similarity to Terran and Martian phylogeny. But not the swampsucker. It was a survivor of an older and fiercer age. I didn't relish the thought of meeting it.

"But let's look on the brighter side," Martinelli said, interrupting my unpleasant thoughts. "There's Ganymede, Io, Callisto, and Mars."

"I'll try to be happy about it," I replied.

He smiled without humor. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," he said.

IO WAS our next stop. The run was made smoothly and without trouble. Oddly enough, the loss of Anderson didn't seem to disturb the ship as much as I expected. There's a difference between dying fighting and being crushed by an impersonal Nature. Anderson had known what his chances were. The fact that he had accepted them made his death easier to take. Why, I don't know.

The Kalliks—big, birdlike animals with downy jet plumage—thoroughly adapted to frigid, nearly airless Io, were an easy assignment. The human colony raised them by the thousands and harvested their feathers for insulation. Our best synthetics couldn't compare with them either in weight or efficiency. Light as thistledown, the black plumage was fireproof, heat transmitting, and cold proof. Each feather possessed the peculiar property of directional transfer of heat. Turn it one way and every local erg of ambient temperature could be channelled inward. Turn it the other and heat would be channeled outward. The Kallik feathers had long ago done away with



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complex and cumbersome refrigeration and heating units. They lined the double hulls of ships, furnished insulation and temperature control for spacesuits, heated and cooled every dome city in the System, and most of the better houses on Earth. As a trade item they were almost priceless and the demand far outstripped the supply. And, since the birds couldn't live away from Io, the moon had a corner on the System's temperature control business. Kalliks were easy to find, and in the hundreds of Kallik brooders dotting the area around the spaceport, it was easy to find nesting Kalliks. The Solar Union crew collected the necessary recordings inside of four hours—and Martinelli found several chitterings of the right tonal quality.

I was almost happy as we took on more chemical fuel and blasted off for Callisto and the whistlers. The whistler is a solitary beast with sufficient antisocial traits to make it a problem to figure out how the species reproduces itself. Their call, a peculiar double-toned ululating whistle, is one of the oddest sounds in the System. It makes the listener want to laugh hysterically—and early explorers often did—with occasional fatal results. The effect on Earthmen is bad enough that the uninitiated are required to wear earplugs.

We set down at the lone spaceport on Callisto, checked in with the Wildlife Conservation Division, who were all too happy to cooperate with us when they learned of our mission. One of the field agents turned out to be a sound bug and had made several recordings of the whistlers, which he was happy to give to the Solar Union men for use in the Natural History Archives.

"See," Martinelli said happily, "things are working out all right now."

I nodded, unconvinced. This was what I'd figured to be the easiest part of the journey. The life forms on Jupiter's moons were singularly friendly and inoffensive. I hadn't expected trouble here and I wasn't disappointed. We stayed only long enough to record our log, visit the officials at the station, and compute a course for Ganymede now on the opposite side of Jupiter.

I WAS glad to get off Callisto—the great, red bulk of Jupiter hanging overhead made me uneasy. I always have the feeling that the Big Boy's satellites are falling into that hell of methane storms raging on the surface. It's not a particularly secure feeling since it leaves me with the same sort of vertigo that grips some people who peer over the edge of earth's skyscrapers. Aboard ship it's differ-



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ent, but on a planetary surface I don't like feeling like a cliff hanger.

WE MET Ganymede about ten hours out, overtook her and made the third landing in as many days. This business of satellite jumping was almost pleasant after the long runs from Pluto and Saturn.

"So you want to record the song of a Hegemon?" the Port Captain asked. He eyed us with amusement—one of those trim, darkly efficient young men who are taking over the Space Service. His voice soothed my jangled Norse nerves like a buzz saw cutting through a steel plate. I've never cared for Civil Servants who eye spacemen with amusement. We may be anachronisms, but we've done more to make the Solar Union work than a regiment of these neatly polished products of the Academy. "I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment, gentlemen," the Port Captain continued. "There probably isn't a hegemon on this world that would sing for you. We humans aren't liked too well."

Small wonder, I thought. If this character is representative of the earthmen on Ganymede, the hegemons would probably be only too happy to see our retreating backsides rather than our faces. I glowered at the captain who returned the glare.

"Have you ever tried cooperating with them?" I asked.

"Why? We have no need for them—and they have none for us. We leave each other alone."

"Oh—great!" I exploded.

"Easy, skipper," Martinelli said. "There's no need to antagonize him."

"Why not? The poor fool obviously knows nothing about Ganymede."

The Port Captain stiffened. Dislike flashed from his brown eyes to my blue ones, and was returned with interest. "Since you are obviously an authority on Ganymedan life, Captain Lundfors," he said, "I would appreciate your views on the matter. They might help us."

"They might at that," I said.

"And what would you suggest?" he asked icily.

"Skipper!" Martinelli said, pleadingly.

I ignored him. "What is your job here?" I asked the Captain.

"To speed the work of the spaceport and improve efficiency, of course."

"Why?"

"So trade can move freely."

"What sort of trade?"

"Machinery, textiles, food, and living equipment from Earth—industrial bort, gem stones, and isotopes from here."

"No wonder the hegemons dislike you!" I said.

"Eh?"



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"Do you know what you're doing?"

"Certainly—we're helping to keep the Solar Union's economy in balance."

"And you're taking without giving. Sure, I'll admit most of the stuff you're using is valueless to the hegemons, and they're perfectly content to let you have it, but after all, it's their property—a part of their world and you take without asking—and conduct a closed trade system—leaving them out. They're intelligent and sensitive in the mass, and they obviously resent being treated like country cousins."

"We have nothing they want," the captain said. "They're the most completely self-sufficient form of life in the Union. We've thought of a thousand things to trade, but they neither want them nor need them. We've been on this world officially for the past ten years, and the traders and prospectors were here nearly a hundred more. No one, except for one man, has in all that time even roused the slightest interest in a hegemon. They tolerate us, but they've never shown any interest in our activities except when we built this spaceport and trading station."

"For trade between Earth and her colonists," I added.

"For Solar Union trade," he corrected.

I GRINNED at him. "I was here in '08," I said. "One of the Old Timers had hegemons doing his work for him. He shipped out with us with over ten million credits in his account."

"You knew Isaac Miller?" the Captain asked. There was a faint note of respect in his voice.

"Sure," I said. "That's the man I was talking about. What about him?"

"He was the only one who ever could work with the hegemons."

"Well—why don't you do what he did?"

"What *did* he do?"

"What? Don't you know? Why—he *told* me he was going to turn his secret over to your people."

The Port Captain nodded. "He was," he said, "but he was killed in a groundcar accident less than a week after he returned to Earth. And he left no records."

"Oh—I didn't know."

"And you know Isaac's secret."

"I think so."

"And you'll give it to us?"

"Why?" I asked.

"What's this?" Martinelli broke in.

"Remember me telling you that we'd have no trouble with the hegemons?" I asked.

He nodded. "But you were wrong."

I shook my head. "I don't think so. It's just that these Solar



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Union lads don't use their heads. They've been ignoring the natives."

"And what's wrong with that?" the Port Captain asked. "Just how do you trade with an entity that has no need for goods —which draws its sustenance out of the rocks—and who has such a completely different standard of behavior that it cannot even recognize that you're intelligent except when you're working in a group? The hegemons neither need nor want goods or money, and since they have neither sex nor sight, nor the ability to taste or smell, there's virtually no way to contact them. The things which appeal to us do not appeal to them. We have no common basics, no meeting grounds. So we go our way and they go theirs. There's one just outside the port—probably a million unit cluster. It's been there ever since we phased in, and it ignores us. Once in awhile it shows a color change, but not often. It just sits there! For ten years it's been sitting there ignoring us. We've tried everything." The captain's young voice sounded human and a little desperate. "And nothing works. Why it stays around is a mystery. Maybe it likes to observe us —with whatever it uses in place of vision."

"No," I said, "it's hoping. That's why it stays."

"Hoping for what?" he asked.

"Hoping that you'll some day get some sense and give it what it wants."

"And what do we have that it could possibly want?"

"Music," I said.

"Music?" his voice was incredulous. "What would a thing like that want with music?"

"Possibly the same thing we do—emotional satisfaction."

"This I'll believe when I see it," the Port Captain said.

"Well, come along and learn something. We old-timers aren't quite as stupid as you youngsters think."

He didn't laugh, but his smile was condescending, like that an indulgent father gives a child. It made me writhe. "I'll come," he said. "I wouldn't miss this for worlds. We've tried sound on it. We know it's senstive to vibrations, but it never displayed the slightest interest."

"Why should it?" I asked. "Let's suppose you were a music lover and someone kept jarring your ears with an oscillator. Would you pay him any attention?"

The Port Captain grinned. "I guess not—except maybe to hit him over the head if he annoyed me too much."

"Now consider the patience and forbearance of the hegemon."

"Hmm—I see—but we did try



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music. Arlo Jelke brought out a whole album of dance music—progressive squirm. He didn't get a nibble.

"Why should he? The hegemon is logical and rational. It wouldn't go for that stuff."

"Maybe you're right," the Port Captain said grudgingly, "but until you prove it I'm not buying."

We wore armor, of course. Not to protect us against the lack of air because there was plenty of that, but to keep the bitter cold from freezing us solid.

THE hegemon, an enormous one, was nestled against the base of one of the low hills just outside the Spaceport Dome. It was an impressive sight, gleaming a rosy pink in the red light of Jupiter hanging above us. A tremendous structure of hexahedral crystals, it spread over nearly half an acre of Ganymede's barren terrain, and as we watched, it moved sluggishly, rearranging the individual crystals of its mass into odd shapes and angularities and geometric patterns of startling beauty. I plucked a crystal from the branch of a surrealist tree that towered beside us. The tiny living entity scarcely two centimeters long, a perfect hexahedron with fine tendrils protruding from either end, was one of the millions of units that composed this monstrous structure of crystalline life. It glowed, first pink and then an angry red, as its life substance realized that it was separated from its fellows. Individually it was nothing—merely a unit in the mass—but collectively a hegemon was a thing of incalculable strength and power. The energies contained in this giant could devastate half of Ganymede if they were released all at once.

I looked at the crystal curiously and replaced it in the mass. Instantly its tendrils entwined with the others' and its crystal shape blended into the growth around us.

The Port Captain looked at me with horror in his eyes. "You were lucky," he said. "I've seen men incinerated for meddling with a hegemon."

"Not for one crystal," I said. "It's too small compared to the total mass. But a dozen of them could burn your hand off." I turned to the Solar Union men who were setting up the recording apparatus from the ship. "You about ready, boys?" I asked.

Their chief, a grizzled veteran named Vance M'bonga, nodded—his white teeth gleaming in the darkness of his face. "Ready, skipper," he said.

"Did you bring that 'Nine Worlds' tape?" I asked Martinelli.



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"I did—but can't we use something else?"

"We could, but it would have to be something this fellow hasn't experienced, and I don't know whether this is one of old Isaac's boys. It's big enough to be, and the fact that it's been hanging around here for ten years makes me think it might have had some close contacts with humanity. So why take chances. We won't miss with this one—and I'd like to show that young fellow something." I jerked my thumb at the Port Captain. "Besides, I figure that patience like this hegemon has shown should be rewarded."

"All right, but I hope you're not barking at the moon," Martinelli threaded the tape on the stereo player and Vance turned the volume on full.

"There's always that chance," I said as I looked past him at Vance. "Okay—let her go," I said "loud and clear."

The opening bars of Raposnikov's "Nine Worlds Symphony" crashed from the speakers.

Instantly the vast mass of the hegemon rippled. Its crystals tinkled like fairy bells, turned a deep red, and shifted with a dazzling rapidity. Before we could move we were encased in a throbbing mass of pulsating ruby crystals that soared over us and around us to form a gigantic million faceted, acoustically perfect dome that changed shades of color to match each change in tempo of the music. Two hundred of Earth's best musicians had poured their talents onto that tape and two million units of an utterly alien life form absorbed that sound with an intensity no human audience could match. Bursts of scintillating colors flashed and rippled over the crystalline mass around us, and the mass itself moved and rippled, approaching the stereo to catch the fainter parts, retreating from the full-throated crescendos, quivering to the glissades, and swaying with the rhythms of the melody. We were standing in the middle of a fantastic concert hall, a hall that lived with the music that filled it—that drank in greedily every note, every nuance of the contrapuntal passages, every chord and harmony.

The Port Captain, the sound specialists from the Solar Union, Martinelli and myself were stunned. I hadn't expected such a response even though I had known in a rough sort of way what would happen. The others, utterly unprepared, were struck dumb by the glittering fairyland that encased them.

Finally it was over. The last notes died, and slowly, reluctantly; the hegemon withdrew to form a gigantic mass, a tower of piled crystals that pulsed with ruby color. And from the glowing crystals came a pure clean



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note of music, so sweet and piercing that our bodies shook to its vibration.

"Record!" I snapped.

Vance moved, snapping the switch of the recorder as the note augmented, strengthened, and grew as the whole hegemon combined its millions of vibrating crystals into a wave of gratitude. We stood there, quivering, as the sound went through us and slowly faded into silence. The crystals nearest our feet drew back and before us, on the dark ground, lay a mass of black glittering crystals.

THE Port Captain took one stunned unbelieving look at the crystals and slowly sank to his knees. "Bort!" he gasped. "Industrial diamonds! Why, there must be fifty kilograms of them!"

"The audience," I said, "always pays for the concert. It appears that our music was appreciated."

"How much is that pile worth?" Martinelli asked.

"About two and a half million credits," I said, "figuring bort at ten credits a carat. That's earthside prices of course. Your music has just shown its first profit."

"My God!" Martinelli's voice was as shaken as the Port Captain's.

"Of course," I continued, "there's the ship's share, the crew's share, the Union's share for taxes, and my share for showing you the secret. Figuring it out fairly, you'll come out about a half million ahead, which isn't too bad for fifteen minutes work."

"Look!" the Port Captain said. "The hegemon's breaking up."

Masses of red-tinged crystals, humming with power, were darting up and away from the central mass which shrank visibly as we watched. Finally, the hegemon vanished.

"What does it mean?" the Captain asked.

"Simple," I said. "The word's going out. There's a new day coming to Ganymede. You won't find the hegemons ignoring you any more."

"I wonder if that's an unmixed blessing."

"You never can tell. Maybe—maybe not. And incidentally, Isaac said that they like Bach best, although most symphonic music will do well until they tire of it. Bach, however, seems to have the best lasting qualities."

"Thanks," the Port Captain said, "but it won't do me any good. By the time the word gets out everybody will be milking this golden cow."

"Of course, they'll never pay like that again," I added, nodding at the heap of bort, "but a few classical tapes can be a profitable investment."



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"But there isn't a classical tape in the whole port! We haven't a longhair in the station complement."

"Too bad," I said, "but maybe you and I can do business. I have a pretty fair library aboard the "Queen." For twenty-five percent I'll let you have enough to make us both rich."

"You're a profiteer and a pirate," Martinelli said. "The only thing that gripes me is that I didn't bring any music besides the 'Nine Worlds', and I can't part with that. There's too much tied up in it."

"More than a few megacredits?" I asked.

He nodded.

"You can keep sole Ganymedan rights," I suggested, "as soon as you've produced the whole symphony. You can license it—or even work Ganymede yourself."

His face cleared. "Of course!" he said. "I'll license it for this planet."

We went back to the ship and negotiated a contract with the Port Captain who was happily contemplating retiring and becoming a prospector. I didn't tell him that he'd find it a lot harder than today's stint. After all, a hegemon that's waited for ten years would probably be more grateful than an ordinary native. And besides, it was probably paralyzed by the "Nine Worlds". Its sense of values might have been distorted. But the young man would do all right—and I'd make a decent profit before Ganymede was glutted with music, and the hegemons raised their prices for helping humans make a profit.

WE braked down into a respectful orbit around Mars. The Red Planet was still the same suspicious place. Martians were never noted for their trusting nature, and with modern technology their distrust extended as far out as the orbit of Deimos. They had never forgotten how the exploration parties had nearly wrecked their culture with the exotic diseases the first humans had brought with them, and they were determined that such things would never happen again.

The Customs and Sanitation boat that came out to intercept us was filled with the typically fussbudget officials that have made Mars a trader's nightmare for the past two centuries. We were examined, poked, prodded, fluoroscoped, X-rayed, tracered and decontaminated until we and the "Queen" were as sterile as an autoclaved forcep. And only then were we permitted to land. I couldn't blame the Martians. In their place I'd act the same way. We were too much alike in structure and metabolism for



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anything less. Human and Martian diseases flourished equally well in either race.

But this took time, and Martinelli was getting impatient. "We have less than six months left," he protested. "This stay in quarantine hasn't helped things any."

"It's the rule," I said. "It does no good to buck it. The whole thing is designed for mutual safety."

"But why do they have to move so slowly?"

"That's the Martian way."

"Ah, yes—the Martian Movement is called the *largo.* I wondered why."

"Your friend Raposnikov must have been a frustrated spaceman," I said.

"He could talk about the planets of the solar system for hours," Martinelli said, "and though he'd never been off Earth except for one tour of the System, he probably knew more about it than most men. He was a shrewd and careful observer."

"So it seems. Well, I hope he was right about his Martian sound effects. The thin air of Mars might make a difference."

"I'm sure he took that into consideration. He hasn't missed so far, has he?"

I shook my head.

We landed at Marsport—the domed Earth town on the outskirts of K'vasteh. Nobody paid us more than casual attention since spaceships were constantly leaving and taking off, and the "Queen" was neither large nor otherwise extraordinary. The Martians had been hearing the sound of jets for so many years that they were used to them, and the absence of the sound would have been more disturbing than its presence. We checked in at Customs, stated our business to a politely incredulous customs officer, drew our billet assignments and settled down to planetside life.

The crew went off to stretch their muscles in the nearest bar. I sat in the port administrative offices cleaning up the inevitable paper work that goes with a Mars touchdown, and Martinelli went off to K'vasteh looking happier than I'd seen him in months. The closer he got to the sun, the lighter his spirits became. He was, I reflected, a true son of Mother Earth. The spacelanes and other worlds didn't interest him. His principal desire was to get through and get home to the familiar sensations of Earth. Mars, to him, was merely the third from the last stop in a trip that was already much too long. The temple bells at K'vasteh were just another sound that had to be obtained, and he intended to obtain them with the least possible trouble.



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I COULD have told him something about those bells, but I didn't have a chance. He was gone before it occurred to me that he might not know. I learned about the Algunite monks a good many years ago and the information was so much an integral part of my background that it was second nature. Algun was the nearest thing the Martians had to a Supreme Deity. Properly translated, the name means "infinite intelligence" and the bells are only rung for a candidate who succeeds in passing the examinations for the priesthood and on the annual Festival of Algun which occurs in the summer on a date fixed by a complicated astronomical calculation performed by the Grand Ecclesiastical Council. Since the Martian year is over twice as long as ours, if we had missed the annual festival our only chance of hearing the bells would be to find a priestly candidate willing to take the examination and capable of passing it.

Finding a candidate would be no trouble, but finding one who would risk the examination was another matter. Since a suitable penalty was provided for failure, few acolytes were willing to take the examination, which was how the priests of Algun managed to keep a large number of acolytes to serve them. In my book priests were the only truly privileged class on Mars. Anything they wanted they had merely to ask and it was given them. The people, I suppose, figured that if the priests were on their side they could receive the benefits of infinite intelligence. And after all, there was some justice in the belief, because a priest *did* wield some awesome powers.

Oh yes—the penalty. It wouldn't be too much to an Earthman but a Martian's ears are much larger. A losing candidate lost his ears, and was driven from the temple. Most failures became hermits and hid their shame in the desert. The rest committed suicide. You see, a Martian's ears are not like ours. They're bigger, more brilliantly colored, and serve as a focussing device for psi-potential. Loss of his ears deprives a Martian of one of his six senses and impairs another. It was a high price for failure.

Martinelli came back looking downcast. "The spring Festival is three months away," he said, "and they won't ring the bells prior to that time."

"Unless a candidate passes the examination for the priesthood," I added.

"Candidate? Priesthood? What's this?"

I explained.

Martinelli's face lightened. "Then it's easy," he said with relief. "All we have to do is find a candidate who wants to be a



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priest—and make sure that he passes."

"Easy," I said without conviction. "Ha! Remember the ears?"

"What could be so hard about it?" Martinelli asked. "There shouldn't be anything we can't answer for him. We can surgically implant a two-way communicator and rig it into the Solar Union branch library here on a direct beam. With all that information to draw upon, a Martian couldn't help but pass *any* test."

I shook my head doubtfully. "The priests know every trick of cheating in the book. In fact, since most of them pass their examinations by some form of dishonesty, you might say that they are experienced experts in academic cheating."

"Do they know about microminiaturization?"

"I suppose so."

"But can you prove it?"

"No."

"Well, then—"

"If you can persuade an acolyte to go along with your scheme, I won't object," I said.

"Where would we find one?"

"Probably in one of the downtown bars in K'vasteh. They live it up during off-duty hours."

"Isn't that an odd sort of activity for a holy man?"

I shrugged. "Different worlds, different customs."

"Want to go with me and help find a volunteer?" he asked.

"Why not? The sooner we get this done, the sooner we get home, and the sooner I get paid."

Martinelli looked at me oddly—an enigmatic expression on his dark face. He nodded.

WE found our acolyte in the Garden of the Seven Delights, one of K'vasteh's plushier night spots. From observation and experience I had long ago deduced that six of the seven delights involved alcohol, narcotics, audio, visual, olfactory, and sexual stimulation, but I never did discover what the seventh was. It involved something peculiarly Martian—about which the natives never talked. When asked they would respond with the irritating Martian cackle that can roughly be translated "find out for yourself if you're so curious." I'll admit I was curious but in a quarter of a century of riding the spacelanes, I had never found out. I figured it had something to do with their peculiar ears, but that was as far as I could go. And not having Martian ears, I would probably never learn anything more than I already knew.

Lor T'shonke was our lad's name, a Senior Acolyte of about fifteen years standing, a typical Martian, small, lean, pigeon-chested, and oddly human in conformation. Only his crest of feathers and scaly legs betrayed his avian ancestry. He reminded



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me of Commander Kelthorn's wry comment to the reporters after the first successful landing and return. "There's a bunch of queer birds on that world," Kelthorn had said—and the description was as good today as it was two centuries ago. Martians *are* queer birds.

T'shonke was in the middle of the First Delight—alcohol. A large amphora of Ko-fruit wine stood on the floor beside his booth and the peculiar narrow-mouthed sipping glass in his hand was half empty. He looked at us fuzzily, his eyes half filmed by the translucent membranes of his third eyelids. He blinked at us, and I was somehow reminded of an earthly chicken. The lower lids of Martians are movable, while the uppers, encrusted in a mass of brilliant red pigmented tissue are more ornamental than useful. A Martian's eyes constantly give an earthman the impression that all Martians are recovering from a three-day binge—but T'shonke was sober enough.

"Greetings, Earthmen, what brings you to this poor table?" he said.

Martinelli looked at me.

"Tell him," I said, "straight out. There's no ceremony. Just get the idea across fast and clean."

"How would you like to be a priest?" Martinelli asked.

T'shonke ran his long, bony fingers over the gorgeous earlobes that drooped in multicolored splendor from the sides of his head. "I would like to very much—but the penalty for failure is too great."

"And if we could fix it so failure was an impossibility?" Martinelli asked.

T'shonke's third eyelids snapped back and his yellow eyes were suddenly alert. "How?" he asked.

"Just a minute," Martinelli said. "What is your answer?"

"If you could guarantee that I would not fail," T'shonke said slowly, "I would pledge anything within reason."

Martinelli glanced at me.

"That's a top offer," I said. "You can go ahead."

"Would the contents of the Solar Union library be sufficient information for your purpose?"

"More than enough," T'shonke said, "except for the mysteries—and I'm well grounded there." His glass floated off the table, the amphora tipped, poured and the glass floated back full. "I can handle up to fifty kilograms—which is twice as good as most priests can do."

"Amazing!" Martinelli said. "Are all of you Martians telekinetics?"

"No—just a certain percentage—like your telepaths—only better trained and better devel-



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oped. We recognized ESP long before you did and made it part of our culture." He sighed. "If only our brains were designed for telepathy."

"That's where we can help," Martinelli said. "We can give you access to the Solar Union library even while you are taking the examination. In effect, you will be a telepath."

"How?"

"We surgically implant a fourth order communicator in your ear—back of the cochlea—and another behind your syrinx. This will allow you to talk to our agents in the library and they'll research any data you want. With the electronic coders in the library this can be done in seconds."

"They give five minutes for thinking," T'shonke mused.

"That would be plenty."

The Martian shook his head. "But it wouldn't work," he said. "It's been tried before." His eyes filmed over. "Two years ago an acolyte tried this technique. He was discovered. His ears are nailed to Algun's altar."

"Why was he discovered?"

"We go before Algun naked as we came into the world and are examined for evidence of cheating. Under X-ray the mechanisms showed."

"That's no problem—the communicator could be made of radio-transparent material."

"The size?—displacement of tissues?"

Martinelli held his fingers a centimeter apart. "That too large?" he asked.

T'shonke shook his head. "If you can do as you say," he said, "I will try to take—but wait—what do you gain from this?"

"The temple bells which will be rung in your honor," Martinelli said. "I wish to record their music."

"But can't you wait until the Festival?" T'shonke's voice was suddenly suspicious.

"You don't understand," Martinelli said, and then he told T'shonke about the "Nine Worlds" symphony.

"Hmm—I see. Now it makes sense. But before I agree, I must be sure that you are telling the truth. Can I hear this music?"

"Part of the first movement," I said. "Enough to give you an idea. No more."

T'shonke cackled. "You know Mars, eh, Earthman?"

I cackled back at him. "I do—a little", I said, "enough to know that Martians can't be trusted with uncopyrighted works of art, literature, or music. You're the biggest cultural thieves in the system."

"Not too much of an honor, considering the other inhabitants," T'shonke said easily.

"If you come to the ship," I said, "we can arrange an audi-



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tion—a limited one—enough to give you an idea."

"That is acceptable," T'shonke agreed. "If I am convinced that the work of art is as great as you say, I will agree."

Martinelli shrugged. "But how will he know?" he asked me.

"I'd trust him," I said. "Mars has been a tremendous customer for classical music. I learned to appreciate it here. I had a month's layover between trips, and used to visit town pretty often. One of the Algun priests took a liking to me and educated my ears to appreciate great music. You can trust the musical judgment of a priest or most acolytes as much as you can trust anyone's. T'shonke'll give you an honest answer."

IT TOOK only half of the first movement to do it. I kept watching T'shonke and gave Martinelli the high sign as soon as the Martian was softened up.

"May I hear the rest?" T'shonke's voice was pleading. "It is the most magnificent music I have ever heard."

"You can hear it all—with the temple bells—the Corens—the hegemon—everything—once it's played in full and the copyright established," I said.

T'shonke's head drooped. "You are a cruel man, Captain Lundfors. You give one a sip of ecstasy and then hide the amphora. I could hate you if I did not know that you are right. There is no sense in jeopardizing such a valuable property. And so you are answered. I will help you. I could do no less—and though my ears may hang on Algun's holy altar, I will still help you. It will be recompense enough to know that I have done something for the greatest music I have ever heard."

"The priesthood should be some reward," Martinelli said.

"It is—but it alone is not enough to justify the risk," T'shonke said. "I'm doing this for the music—the sixth delight—not for the honor and power of the priesthood."

I had never seen a Martian so moved. It amazed me. I had always thought of them as coldly intellectual and thoroughly sensual, but not emotional. Perhaps it took something as superlative as Raposnikov's music to move them and any lesser thing was not enough. Whatever it was, T'shonke was our Martian as much as though he had thumbprinted an oath of service.

It was no effort to install the tiny transmitter-receiver units and within half an hour T'shonke was connected to us by electronic bonds that worked perfectly well inside the temple and out. We tested the hookup thoroughly for nearly a week, under every conceivable situation. It worked per-



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fectly, and finally, satisfied, Martinelli passed the word to T'shonke that everything was ready. We hadn't seen the Martian since that one night when we had recruited him but that wasn't necessary. Since we were in electronic contact personal visits were needless—and they would have done nothing to help matters. Acolytes who apply for examination for the priesthood are watched closely and suspiciously. T'shonke, we hoped, because of his long service, was not suspect enough to warrant being tailed prior to our meeting. Now, however, he was watched night and day.

We had already moved our recording equipment into an empty apartment opposite Temple Square and the Solar Union technicians were on watch day and night for the first sound of the bells.

And while we waited T'shonke entered the inner sanctum of the temple to take his examination. I passed the word and our whole complex linkage between T'shonke and the Solar Union Library in K'vasteh was alerted. We waited eagerly as the minutes dragged into hours. But there wasn't a sound over the hookup. Not once did T'shonke press the activator button. Night fell, and day brightened without a single call for help.

And then the bells rang out! A thunderous chorus pealing through the thin Martian air. From the two hundred ton monster in the lower course to the tiny silver klingers in the uppermost tower, the great bell concourse rang out with a tone and brilliance unknown to the thick air of earth. And then, with a final shimmer of sound that slowly sank to silence, it stopped.

The cessation was so abrupt, so unexpected, that a thrill of fear shot through me. I had never heard the bells cease so abruptly before. There was something final about it, as though a period had been placed behind an interlude. Worried, I called the sound crew.

"We've got it. They're all on tape," Vance said. "But all hell's popping down below us in the temple square!"

"What's the matter?"

"Seems like a lynching party. Migod! They're tearing some poor native limb from limb!" Vance gasped.

I didn't need the letter that came half an hour later by messenger to tell me what had happened. "Honored Sir", it began. "I failed. The first time I tried the communicator and saw the High Priest smile I knew I was discovered. And when I could not contact you, I knew, as neither you nor I did before, that Algun is truly Infinite Wisdom and His priests know about fourth order



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radiation. They took me from the place of examination, cut my ears from my head, nailed them to the holy altar—and drove me from the temple. I am disgraced and maimed as no living Martian should be. The sixth and seventh delights are barred to me who enjoyed them more than all the rest. I have no will to live, yet ere I die, I will perform one act for memory of the ultimate in music. I still have a set of keys to the temple. I know the stations of the guard. And for once the bells of Algun will ring for something greater than either priest or festival.—Farewell." The letter was unsigned, but I didn't need the signature.

"What happened?" Martinelli asked.

Wordlessly I handed him the letter. He looked at it, puzzled. "I can't read Martian," he said.

I told him what T'shonke had done.

His reaction didn't surprise me. He looked sick. He loathed violence. "So we have the bells," he said in a dull voice. "Fine, now let's get going. We have only five months left."

"Four and a half," I corrected.

WE WERE standing on the shadow rim of Mercury. Behind us was darkness and bitter cold, and the lifeboard which had brought us here. Ahead was the blazing corona of the sun and temperatures hot enough to melt lead. The sunward side of Mercury was an inferno, with soft crusts of semi-solid magma, spouting volcanoes and a ghastly brimstone atmosphere that corroded metal and ate through rubber and plastic as though the refractory substances were so much paper. It was no world for human beings, yet humans lived and worked here, extracting the heavy metals from the sizzling surface of the Sunward side and processing them for the use of the Solar Union's expanding economy. There were native lifeforms, the dominant one a grisly armored creature roughly resembling a lobster in size and shape. They were primarily vegetarian, and offered no trouble except for their numbers and the fact that they tended to congregate around Earth settlements or lumber painfully after exploring parties. Since they were neither good to look upon nor to eat, men tolerated them as another unpleasant fact of existence on Mercury and tried their best to ignore them. There were about twenty of them following us, appearing abruptly from holes in the rugged surface, waving their long-jointed antennae solemnly as they scuttled over the rocky soil. Before us the flaming glory of the corona leaped and flickered above the knife black edge of the escarpment which separated us



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from the shimmering hell of the sunward zone. In many areas the transition from darkness to light was not nearly so abrupt, but we had selected this one because of the relative protection the escarpment offered. Ahead of us Vance and his crew were pushing on toward the rimrock with the little remote controlled track layers that carried the sound equipment. In some respects this was an unnecessary journey since the sounds could be perfectly simulated by boiling a pot of thick gelatin over a low flame. But the contract specified actual sounds and so we had come to Mercury at the risk of life and limb to complete the next to last part of our mission.

Martinelli's voice came to me over my headset mixed with the roar and crackle of the solar wind as streams of electrons hurtled outward from the sun toward the farthest reaches of space. The static was inconceivable to anyone who hasn't experienced it, and here on the edge of the sunny side communication was virtually non-existent. Through the snap, crackle, pop and hiss, I managed to decipher Martinelli's words.

"Think", he said, "have gone —enough—up here and get out as ——— as possible. This place ——— on my nerves ———."

"Me too," I said, and then repeated it a couple of times to make sure he got it. "Vance'll take the records—and then we'll blow."

"Good!".

Conversation was exhausting so we gave it up by mutual consent and watched the sound crew up ahead. They approached the edge gingerly and sent the equipment carriers ahead on their control lines. Electronic communication was hopeless up there. The track layers disappeared over the crest, guided by Vance and the four men of the crew crouched behind the rimrock with their recording instruments.

Time passed until Vance finally gave us the high sign and began to reel the tractors in. Two of the men, Tayler and O'Banion, packed up their equipment and moved back down the hill toward us while Vance and the fourth, a man named Stanley, his first *and* last name incidentally, brought the carriers back. The two recording techs were halfway down to us when the Merc-quake struck.

The ground beneath our feet shifted and rolled as we fought to keep our balance. The two techs were knocked off their feet and came rolling down the slope together with dust, rocks and boulders. The Mercurians following us scuttled back towards level ground, their antennae waving wildly. I had the odd impres-



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sion that they were communicating with each other, that their intelligence was greater than we thought—and then the whole scene dissolved into a kaleidoscope of chaos. I had the confused impression of a hundred things happening at once, that a giant rift had appeared in the wall of the escarpment into which tumbled the doll-like figures of Vance M'bonga and Stanley followed by the child's-toy shapes of the track layers. I was frightened beyond any fear I had ever experienced in my life.

I wanted to run—I *was* running, stumbling, staggering, staying erect by some miracle, leaping across cracks crisscrossing the tortured crust, dodging giant boulders and fumaroles that leaped hell hot and hissing from the torn earth. I was helpless and alone—more so than I had ever been in my life. The awesome power of the quake stunned and confused me—and it was nearly a minute before my reason took control and shook my fight or flight mechanism into some sort of sanity. Shivering with reaction and adrenalin I turned to face the direction from which I had come.

Behind me was shambles!

The quake had distorted the whole area, and through the dust and steam, landing across the rise to the cleft in the escarpment the intolerable glow of Sol's corona cut with brilliant light. Our lifeboat was miraculously intact.

Vance and Stanley were gone, but sprawled grotesquely on the torn and steaming rock were the two green-suited bodies of the sound crew, and bending over them was the yellow-suited figure of Martinelli.

"Hang on!" I yapped into my communicator. "I'm coming."

"Hurry!" Martinelli's voice came back over a roar of static. "Tayler's in bad shape!"

I CAME back almost as swiftly as I left. Tayler was still breathing, but he didn't look too good. A two-inch gash was ripped through the belly of his suit and there was red blood visible on the green armor. Martinelli was futiley trying to hold the gap closed with his armored hands and making a poor job of it. I tore open my emergency kit, pushed him aside, slapped a wet patch on the tear, turned Tayler's oxygen to full, flushed the suit, and turned to O'Banion. He was apparently all right—paralyzed with fear but otherwise unharmed. Martinelli was supporting him with one arm while the other cradled two flat canisters of sound tape that he had picked up from beside the men.

"You get it all on tape?" he asked as he shook O'Banion's shoulder. He wasn't gentle about



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it but he produced results. The man's eyes focussed.

"Not the earthquake," he said.

"Merc-quake," I corrected absently as I arranged his companion to a more comfortable position. Tayler was breathing easier now but his face was contorted with pain. Mercury's corrosive atmosphere had cooked a large patch of his chest and shoulder, and he was suffering the indescribable agony of first degree burns.

"I don't give a damn about the earthquake," Martinelli snapped. "Did you get those sounds of Mercury's boiling surface?"

O'Banion nodded. "They're in those cans," he said indicating the two canisters Martinelli held. "Vance sent us back with them. Said he thought they'd be safer —say—where is Vance?—and Stanley?"

"Gone," Martinelli said. "They fell into that crack in the escarpment." He gestured upward at the lance of light flashing through the torn rimrock.

"Oh God!—poor Vance."

"We'll have to get out of here," I said to Martinelli. "I'll carry Tayler and you take care of O'Banion."

"Why?" Martinelli asked.

"Because he needs help," I said. "And because I said so."

Olaf Martinelli looked at me with something like contempt in his brown eyes. "I don't need you to give me orders. After that fancy bit of running—"

"Sure—I was scared." I said. "I panicked—and I'm ashamed of it—but I'm still captain."

"Very well—captain." He made the title sound like obscenity.

I winced. It did me no good to reflect that I had come back. I shouldn't have run in the first place. A captain should never run —but the quake had done something to me that I hadn't realized was possible. It had made me afraid. All I wanted now was to get back into the familiar surroundings of the "Queen" and nurse my injured psyche.

But there was something else to do first. "You two get going," I said to Martinelli and O'Banion. "I'll be along later."

"Where are you going?"

"Up there." I gestured at the rimrock. "Mercury's gravity is lighter than Earth's. The fall may not have killed Vance and Stanley."

"What about Tayler? I can't carry him," Martinelli said.

"You won't have to. On second thought he may be safer here. Get back to the boat and try to contact the "Queen". Have them send out a rescue party."

"But you're the only one who can pilot the lifeboat."

"Who said anything about piloting the boat," I snapped. "You can work the communicator as well as I can."



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"But we don't dare stay here."

"We can dare anything until I find out whether Vance and Stanley are alive or not." I turned my back on the protesting Martinelli and moved up the slope toward the crack in the rimrock.

There is no point in recounting the difficulty of the climb, or the difficulty of the descent into the crack. I did it somehow and found the mangled body of Stanley quickly enough—but Vance was nowhere in sight. With frantic speed I checked the shattered rock, looking for something—anything — that would give me an indication of Vance's fate. I was about ready to give up when I saw a tiny spot of fluorescent orange gleaming from beneath a pile of rocks and debris. I clawed the covering away—and found Vance alive but unconscious. A rock had smashed his air intake, and in a few more moments he would be dead. I ripped my hoses loose and forced them into the helmet nozzle and gave him a stiff jolt of oxygen. Working as rapidly as I dared, I bent the crumpled intake back into an approximation of normal, connected his airlines and dug him out of the debris.

He was horribly battered, but he would continue to live if he were gotten to medical attention quickly. Gently I lifted him, my big space-trained muscles easily supporting him under Mercury's low gravity, and picked my way back to where I had left Tayler. He was still there, but so was the "Queen's" second lifeboat. I was never so happy to see anyone as I was to see Egon Bernstein, and judging from the grin on his ugly face the feeling was mutual.

"Bernie," I said, "thank God you came!"

"Do you think I'd trust anyone else?" he replied.

I didn't say anything for a moment. Just stood and enjoyed the feeling of mutual trust and friendship that flowed between us. We'd been bucketing around the Solar System together for quite a few years and words weren't necessary.

"Get those two to the Mercury Station hospital," I said. "I'll take Martinelli back to the ship."

"How about Stanley?"

I shook my head. "He isn't very pretty. We can take care of him later."

Bernie nodded. "Well—there's worse places to die than on Mercury." He didn't say where and frankly I doubted if he knew a worse place, but he was a perennial optimist.

WE BLASTED off without Vance and Tayler. They would recover—modern medicine being what it was—but it would be weeks before either of them was fit to travel. We went back



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for Stanley, but the Mercurians had been there first—and I learned why they followed us around. Sooner or later, they hoped, I suppose, that something would happen to us. You see, they saw something in us that was important. Our skeletons were virtual treasure troves of calcium and phosphorous. And so they had *salvaged* Stanley. There was nothing left of him but meat. Every bone had been dissected from his body by the sharp chelae of the natives. The stories were right. Mercurians weren't carnivorous, but like all organic life, they needed minerals—particularly light minerals, and these weren't too common on the sunworld. We buried what was left of Stanley and erected a stone cairn over the spot.

Venus City was the same as ever—a dome town anchored near the north polar cap of the cloudy planet. Looking around me at the steaming swampland environment, I wondered how the old-time planetographers had ever come to the conclusion that Venus was lifeless. The formaldehyde and carbon dioxide in the upper atmosphere probably fooled them as did the thermal layer a hundred kilometers up. But the ground level was just about like the old-time writers had predicted, hot, humid, and swampy. Venus was going through another Carboniferous period. Plants and animals of huge size covered the surface everywhere except the equator where it was too hot even for their adaptability. On Venus a high degree of specialization and relatively quick geologic changes probably explained why there was no intelligent life. The eras, periods, and epochs followed swiftly upon each other's heels and the geologic climatic and environmental changes were incredibly brief when compared to the other habitable worlds of the solar system. An epoch lasting scarcely a million years is insufficient time in which to develop intelligence, particularly when a million years on Venus were only two-thirds as long in duration as a similar period on Earth.

But there was life—plenty of it—and the biggest, deadliest and most indestructible form was the swampsucker. Imagine, if you can, a hundred meter length of suction hose, two meters in diameter, armored with ten centimeter thick chitin plates, and possessing a rudimentary intelligence and highly developed sense organs that can detect disturbances in water pressure up to a half kilometer away. Now endow that hose with a voracious appetite and a digestive system that can handle anything from leaves to animal protein and you have the swamp-



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sucker. Its toothless maw, fully a meter and a half in diameter, is ringed with hairlike stinging cells whose long processes, tipped with barbs containing a potent cytotoxin can reach out a full ten meters in any direction. Behind the mouth are two large collapsible muscular sacs set along the gullet. These can be dilated with extreme rapidity causing a vollent suction that engulfs any prey paralyzed by the stinging cells. Food and water are forced down the gullet and the excess water removed through a sievelike valve in the stomach. The food remains to be digested, absorbed and excreted through the long gut filling most of the posterior two-thirds of the animal. The nervous system consists of a series of ganglia connected by a doral nerve trunk. Each ganglion supports a number of sense organs roughly comparable to eyes and ears—and pressure receptors like those along the sides of earthly fishes. It is a formidable beast, that like the fabled Choggemugger, doesn't die all at once, and until men came to Venus was the undisputed lord and master of the entire planet. It isn't now. It had met a smarter, more voracious, more greedy life form and was rapidly being exterminated. If it only had brains it might have held its world, but ganglia are no match for a functioning cerebrum—and Venus was rapidly becoming man's world.

TO FIND a swampsucker and record its voice would take a full-fledged expedition, since the giant wormlike creatures had been driven from the polar and temperate regions to a thin strip of the subtropics girdling the planet where the temperature was too high for humans. Venerean life existed there in relative comfort, but even air conditioning and insulation couldn't make it comfortable for man.

It would require an expedition which Martinelli reluctantly agreed to finance. It took a considerable amount of his share of the industrial diamonds to procure the necessary swampcats, men, and materiel. And since Venerean colonists are by nature dilatory and haggling, it took considerably more time. I didn't like this latter aspect since we had little better than two months to complete the contract and return to Earth, and time was running short. So I spent some of my own share of the bort to speed things along. At that, it took better than a week to accumulate the necessary gear—a task that could have been done on Earth or Mars in less than a day.

For some reason, Martinelli had become morose and unapproachable. He kept to himself



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and discouraged conversation and company. At best he hadn't been too gregarious. After nearly nine months in the close confinement of a spaceship, men normally get to know each other pretty well, but none of us really knew Martinelli. He was an island to himself, a closed system that none of us could enter. Not even I, who was closer to him than any other man on the "Queen" could figure out precisely what made him operate. Lately he had taken to chumming with Bellini, the survivor of the two "experts" he had brought aboard, and pointedly ignored me.

I suppose I had it coming after that exhibition on Mercury—but why he should choose Bellini as a companion was beyond me. The fellow knew his way around Venus all right, but from an intellectual point of view he simply wasn't. He was a cultural cipher, his conversation limited to women and occasional monosyllabic grunts. The crew had milked him dry in less than four months, and while they tolerated him, they didn't exactly encourage his company. Possibly, I speculated wryly, it was a case of two misogynists getting together.

We set out in two swampcats —combination boats and track layers twenty meters long, armored and gunned heavily enough to discourage even the most ferocious life on this ferocious planet. A Venerean colonist named Riley, a big red bearded brute of a man, commanded one boat, and Bellini had charge of the other. And for the first time Martinelli didn't come with me. He went with Riley and I with Bellini. We kept to the waterways, watching the dank yellowish green vegetation slip by, and listening to the pounding rain that clattered intermittently on our metal roof and the peaceful hum of the nuclear engine in its safety well amidships.

Five days found us well in the subtropic zone and the temperature was rapidly becoming uncomfortable. We pushed on more slowly—separated about two miles apart, twisting our way through the tortuous waterways, looking for swampsuckers. We saw one on the second day of our search, a young male, scarcely twenty meters long. The little fellow had guts if not good sense for he came at us with every intent of swallowing us, paused as he sensed that our size was somewhat larger than his own, and vanished in a pall of greasy black smoke as Bellini incinerated him with the semi-portable in the turret on the roof.

"They grow up," Bellini said coldly as he safetied the guns.

WE KEPT in close radio contact since we couldn't see



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each other, and continued to head southward. The ambient temperature rose steadily. Our Kallik feather insulation was set nearly at full negative. It kept the temperature bearable, but even so, it was miserable since the feathers did nothing about the humidity. Only Bellini seemed to be able to keep control of his temper. The remaining three of us, myself, Ward O'Banion—the Solar Union man—and Karl Albertini our native engineer, snapped and snarled at each other as the misty silence chewed at our nerves.

"We're getting into the area where the big ones hang out," Bellini said as our swamp cat churned slowly through a weed-choked waterway. "They don't come into these shallows—can't push their weight through them—which is why we have the weeds. They need enough water to support them. But when we reach a clear channel—look out. There'll be one in the area."

We went forward slowly, partially on our tracks and partly on propellors, leaving a broad trail of dirty gray mud and torn vegetation behind us. The sunlight, filtered and diffused by the hazy atmosphere and the impenetrable cloud blanket overhead, turned the whole area into a misty nightmare where one direction was the same as another. A man outside would have no chance of finding his way back to Venus City. Even if he managed to avoid the deadly life in the swamps, the heat and humidity would quickly boil the life from him. It takes a trip to Equatorial Venus for one to realize how dependent man is on temperature and humidity. Our protective mechanisms of sweat glands and evaporation would be no help at all in this enormous steam bath.

I looked at the outside temperature indicator. A hundred and fifty—nearly at the boiling point of water on Venus. Farther south the water did boil—contributing clouds of steam to the hothouse effect that made Venus habitable only at the Polar regions. Men were at work terraforming Venus. They had been at work for nearly two hundred years, but their labors had shown precious small result. The scientists figured that perhaps another century would see the breakpoint, when the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere was reduced to the point where the hothouse cycle could be broken. Earth plants, bred for Venerean conditions were doing their bit to absorb the excess gas in the air, and were doing it well—but the effects weren't apparent yet—nor would they be until the critical point was reached. The rains would come then. Enormous rains like those



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once seen on Earth in the days of her youth. And there would likely be floods—enormous floods that would put the stories of Noah's Ark to shame. And when it was all over, Venus would have a climate approximating that of Earth, and on the island continents rising above the shallow seas, Earthmen could live in relative comfort and build a new future. But that was centuries away and now men clung here rather than stood, and existed rather than lived.

I didn't like Venus. I hated its heat, its heavy oxygen-starved air, its swamps and insensately ferocious life. I would be happy when this trip was over and we were again in the clean blackness of space with the stars gleaming in unwinking splendor about us and the sun dazzling with its prominences and corona. And I would be more happy back on Earth with this Odyssey completed and Martinelli's fee in my pocket. A year was a long time to be on the flit, and like all sailors from time immemorial I would be glad to see the home port again.

Our vehicle tipped forward into a broad scoured channel of black water.

"Here's a lair," Bellini said. "Check the ports and see if we're buttoned up. A sucker can get his stingers through an open port as easily as you can walk through a door. Check the ventilator screens, and see that every hole and opening is sealed."

I spread the word and the two crewmen and I checked the craft and satisfied ourselves that she was as tight as a spacer.

"All secure," I reported.

"Good!" Bellini said. "I'll start the oscillator now."

"Eh?"

"It's just an ordinary oscillator," Bellini explained. "The vibrating diaphragm is under water. We found out that it's the best gadget to attract them when we cleaned out the temperate zones." He flipped a switch and slowly turned the knob of the rheostat back and forth, listening intently as he did so.

I HEARD it almost as soon as he did. Or rather, I felt it. You don't hear most of the sounds an adult sucker makes. You feel them. They start in the subsonic range and rise to a ululating shriek that practically lifts the top off your head. O'Banion snapped on his recording apparatus and bent over his dials, fiddling with them for a moment until he got the mix right. He pushed back his headset and looked at me.

"Weird, isn't it?" he asked.

"It gets you," I admitted. And frankly I was understating. Subsonics depress me. Some people are terrified by them. Others be-



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come morbid, and still others can be shocked into unconsciousness. There are a whole range of responses that can be triggered by low frequency sound. Personally, I don't like them.

"Cut the engines," Bellini ordered. "Quiet. Don't move. Don't make a sound. There's two of them out there."

The whole vehicle was vibrating as two fat smooth waves came toward us from each end of the weedless channel. We crouched near the portholes watching the waves approach. From each of them came crimson glints as the dull light struck the upper edges of the giant mouth orifices.

"If those two are males," Bellini whispered, "you'll see something that you can tell your grandchildren. If one of them is a female, you'll see something you can't tell anyone." He chuckled, the sound a harsh whisper in the damp stillness that surrounded us.

Sweat broke out on my face as the two waves rushed together—and the water exploded!

A giant geyser erupted beside the boat and from the center of the boiling foam we could catch glimpses of the gargantuan snakelike armored bodies writhing and twisting beside us.

"Males!" Bellini said in a tone of satisfaction as the water boiled and heaved. An armored body crashed against the side of our vehicle, hurling us sideways through the water. The shock knocked me from my feet and as I scrambled to get up I saw Bellini slide into the gunner's seat and grasp the controls of the semi-portable in the turret on the roof.

"Don't!" I yelled, but Bellini was past hearing. His heavy features were convulsed with hate as he twisted the twin blasters to bear on the boiling water beside us. And the guns added their din to the roaring and bellowing outside.

Gouts of black smoke leaped from the nearest body mixed with puffs of steam as the bolts struck and incinerated whole sections of the monster. It was dead at the first blast, but its decentralized rudimentary nervous system didn't realize the fact. But it did realize we were present from the vibrations of our guns. A score of filaments leaped from the water and snapped around the turret as the severed mouth parts of the monster attempted to seize and paralyze the half inch armor plate of the turret.

Bellini twisted the gun controls, his face a mixture of rage and fear. Overloaded servos whined and a thin curl of smoke came from beneath the seat, and then the safety relays clicked as the overload became too great.



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In that instant we were disarmed.

I LOOKED outside at the thick bundle of filaments and the ghastly nacreous pink of the two meter wide, roughly circular mouth orifice hanging from our topside, and as I watched the filaments tightened convulsively as the front end of the monster died.

"Where's the other one?" I snapped at Bellini.

He looked past me. He hadn't heard a word I'd said. His eyes were fixed on the mass of protoplasm hanging from our topside. We were listing dangerously, our upper deck perilously near the muddy water as the weight of the front parts of the sucker dragged us down.

"Bellini!" I shouted, putting every ounce of authority I possessed into my voice.

He looked at me, his glazed eyes focussing slowly. "Yeah—what's the matter?" he said thickly. "What's going on?"

"You damned fool!" I raved. "What in hell were you trying to do—kill us? Where's the other sucker?"

"What other sucker?" His voice was thick with shock.

"The one you weren't shooting at—" I stopped. He wasn't getting it. Something had snapped inside his mind. For the moment, at least, he was merely an automaton. I clambered painfully to my feet. O'Banion was lying on the deck, bleeding from a gash over his temple. He was out cold. I looked down the engine-room well. Albertini was sitting on the deck next to the reactor, his leg twisted oddly beneath him.

"You all right?" I asked.

"I think it's broken," Albertini said, gesturing at his leg. "I fell down the hatch when the sucker hit us. What happened up there?"

"Bellini blasted one of the suckers," I said. "Its front parts are wrapped around the turret. Bellini's in shock. O'Banion's knocked cold, and we're damn near capsized."

"That's no news," the engineer said, gesturing at the slanted deck beneath him. Point is—what are you going to do about it. We can't travel like this."

"First, maybe I'd better set your leg."

"That can wait. We'd better get straightened up and get out of here. Without guns we haven't a chance. You'll have to free that turret."

"Me and who else?" I asked "I'm not going out there alone."

"Me," a voice said above me. I looked up. Bellini was standing in the hatchway. "I got us into this, and I'll get us out." His leathery face wore its usual normal stupid expression and his eyes were clear.



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"What happened to the other sucker?" I asked.

"It's busy. It won't bother us. It's eating the one I killed. Oughta keep it busy for days." He grimaced. "Guess I sorta made a fool of myself up there, but I hate those critters. One of them ate my brother."

"Oh," I said. Actually there wasn't anything more to say. "Well—what do we do about the piece that's hanging on us?"

"We cut it off. Careful. Those stingers are still loaded. They'll stiffen anyone who touches them."

"What'll they do to a man?"

"I don't know. Nobody that's had anything to do with them ever came back to tell about it."

"Oh fine," I said. "You do the cutting. I'll hold."

He grinned at me. "We'll both cut," he said. "You may be skipper on the 'Queen', but you're crew here. This is my show."

I had to admit that he was right. We went back topside and I checked O'Banion. He was all right, but still dazed. In an hour or so he'd probably be as good as ever except for a headache.

WE TOOK brush axes, big broad-bladed things with razor edges, made for hacking through the tough rubbery growth on Venus' surface, and cautiously made our way out the after hatch to the slanting deck.



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Filaments were everywhere, tipped with rows of fat, spindle-shaped excrescences armed with needle-like prongs.

"Stay away from those," Bellini said. "Chop 'em loose and rake 'em overboard. Once we get rid of those stingers we can start on the rest of the mess. He looked over the side at the gaping, corrugated, six-foot funnel of rubbery flesh. Dead, it was gray. Its nacreous red color had vanished but it was, if possible, even more horrible than it had been alive. I looked down at the fringe of wrist-thick cilia surrounding its outer rim and shivered.

We worked slowly and carefully, cutting our way through the mass of interlacing filaments covering the deck, working slowly forward to the dense meshwork of pallid strands that virtually hid the turret.

"God! What a beast!" I muttered as my axe sliced through the rubbery flesh.

"You don't know the half of it," Bellini panted beside me as his axe sliced through two thick filaments. The gaping mouth below us sagged a little and the swampcat rolled sluggishly in the water. "Another four or five and I think we'll be able to clear the turret." He drove his axe into the nearest fiber.

"Yeah—looks like we're going to make it all right," I said.

"You never can tell—we just might be attracting another with all the noise we're making," Bellini said.

Involuntarily I turned to look up the waterway behind me, and the head of Bellini's axe whizzed through the spot where I'd been.

"What's the big idea?" I yelped.

"The idea is that Mr. Martinelli told me to get you out of the way," Bellini grunted. "And since you're no use to me now—" he swung the axe again.

I stumbled backward as the curved razor-edge split the air in front of me. I was numbed. I had expected almost anything except this. But the next time Bellini drew his axe back for a swing I was ready for him. I jabbed with the axe head, catching him in the chest. His feet slipped on the slimy deck and he slid backward into the nest of filaments still covering the turret. He screamed once as the stinging cells bit into his flesh and struck the deck as stiffly rigid as though someone had short-circuited his nervous system.

I felt for his pulse. His heart was still beating, so I dragged him back to the after deck. I felt like pushing him over the side, but there would be no profit in that. After all, he was the one who knew the way out of this swamp. I was no surface navigator.



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Quickly I cut the remaining strands and dragged Bellini inside. Hardly had I fastened the hatch when the water boiled alongside us, and a great net of filaments shot out to enfold the severed end of the dead swamp-sucker as it floated low in the water. Bellini had been right after all. We had attracted another sucker.

Freed of the weight of the dead monster we drifted slowly toward shore, and once near an estuary that ran into the waterway, I started the engine and headed full speed into the shallow water. Behind us the main waterway boiled as a dozen filaments snapped out of the sullen surface to fall short by a good ten feet as we churned up the shallow waterway. The big suckers couldn't follow us up here, and I wasn't afraid of the little ones.

I spent the next hour getting the engineer's leg bandaged, and a plastiform compress on O'Banion's aching head. Bellini was still alive and still rigid in a tetanic convulsion that left his limbs locked in extension. There was nothing I could do for him, so I went outside and cautiously removed the remnants of the sucker that were still clinging to the deck and checked the turret. It moved easily. Once again we were ready for trouble.

Then I checked the ship. The engines were all right, but the jolt the sucker had given us had damaged our radio. It was dead, and so was our main power supply. That collision had done more than cripple our crew. It had shorted out the main power leads from the generator and our entire electronic complex was a mess. Our inertial navigator was out, our computer was dead, our radio direction finder was a hopeless mass of fused circuits.

"Think you can fix the electronics?" I asked O'Banion.

"I can try," he said grimly. "But I don't think so."

"Just what in hell happened to the relays?" I complained as I surveyed the wreckage.

"Someone wired across them," O'Banion said, as he pried into the breaker box. "Not a one of them had a chance to work."

"Why?" I demanded.

"This is Venus," Albertini said. "These gadgets are Earth-built and Earthers don't understand what we have up here. We work on hundred percent overload most of the time. We have to jump the relays. They turn our gear off when we need it most."

I didn't say anything but I thought plenty. Here we were, three thousand kilometers from base in a crippled ship, hopelessly lost, and without communication. We could travel, but we were in a bad way.



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"Well—go ahead," I said. "Meanwhile we'll sit here. It seems safe enough and it's going to be nightfall before long. There's no use getting worse lost than we are already.

TOWARDS morning Bellini began to stir, and by early afternoon was capable of some movement. O'Banion, however, couldn't fix the radio or anything else.

"About half the transistors are burned out," O'Banion said. "That jolt broke the primary leads loose and dropped them across the main bus bars from the generator. The circuitry's ruined."

"Oh great! How do we do without it?"

O'Banion shrugged. "Maybe we'd better ask Bellini. He should know how to get us out of here. Incidentally, what happened to him?"

"He slipped," I answered. "Slid into a couple of stingers."

"Hmm—sure made him stiff, didn't it?"

"It's lucky he wasn't killed. But I wish he'd come to. He's the only one of us with knowledge enough to get us out of here."

"Not the only one," Albertini interrupted. "I can do it too. It's easy."

"So?"

"Sure—all water on Venus flows from the poles toward the equator. Except for the polar mountains in the northern and southern hemispheres, the whole land's damn near flat. Down in the equatorial regions the water's literally boiled off as steam and the water from the polar condensation flows into refill what's boiled off. So you just pick a big waterway with a visible current and work upward against it. Ultimately it'll get you north again, and once we hit civilization it'll be easy to make a call into Venus city."

"Sounds easy," I said. "What's the catch?"

"Swamp suckers. The big waterways are full of them this far south."

"And how do we beat that? We haven't enough size or power to blast our way through a wall of sucker meat. Not if they're as big as those last two."

"They're not—at least I don't think they are," Albertini said. "And we'll have to take the chance. Otherwise we can run around in circles until our fuel deteriorates—and then we're done."

"Not a pleasant thought," O'Banion commented.

Funny, I mused, how different environments produce different responses. On Mercury, O'Banion funked out worse than I did, but here, in a situation just as bad, he was as cool as ice. I wondered what made the difference.



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BELLINI never really became conscious the entire four weeks it took us to claw our way northward against the opposition of swampsuckers and other noxious forms of Venerean life that were smaller but no less deadly. He had moments of lucidity but quickly relapsed into the partial coma that had held him since the tetanic rigidity had worn off. He couldn't move and we took turns massaging his flaccid body to keep the circulation going and to prevent decubital ulcers. From what I saw, I doubted if Ivan Bellini would ever again be a useful member of society.

And as the days passed I became increasingly anxious. After two weeks I became frantic, after three, resigned, and when the fourth week arrived I lost hope. My contract was violated. By no stretch of the imagination could the "Queen" make it back to Earth in time for me to fulfill it. Time was up in another two weeks, and Martinelli would enforce the penalty clause for nonconformance.

I'd been suckered. Everything pointed to it. Martinelli wanted a free trip and a chance to enforce the penalty clause in our contract. At one stroke he could avoid payment and stand to collect a sizeable penalty fee. Yet, somehow, I didn't believe Bellini's story that Martinelli wanted me dead. It was out of character. You can't collect from a dead man, and I knew that my contract had the proper escape clauses. In the event of my death the "Queen", if she survived, went to my family in Oregon. They'd sell her, of course, but Martinelli wouldn't be able to collect from my estate. Probably my crooked employer meant it literally when he told Bellini to get me out of the way and the dumb slob had interpreted him wrong.

No matter how it came out I was going to be taken. My passage money, the bort, and maybe the "Queen" herself would have to be sacrificed to satisfy Martinelli. As I thought it out a cold anger filled me. Martinelli might have me over a legal barrel, but I would have payment out of his hide if it took the rest of my life.

We ran into a swampland ranch about midway through the third day of the fourth week. The rancher, a leathery muscular character, superficially like Bellini, was glad to loan us a radio and a directional loop and give us directions how to reach Venus City. As quickly as I could I contacted the spaceport operator. "Get me Egon Bernstein, chief engineer of the 'Virgin Queen' in dock at Bay 18."

"Sorry," the operator said.

"Sorry, hell! This is Lundfors —I'm skipper of that can."



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"That's impossible," the spaceport said.

"So it's impossible. I'm still Captain Lundfors!" I yelled.

"And I'm still sorry, but I'm afraid I can't help you. You see, the 'Queen' filed a flight plan for Earth over two weeks ago. By now, she should be half way there."

"Without me?"

"I assumed you were aboard, sir. At least the flight plan was filed in your name."

I sighed—so I was marooned. I wondered how Martinelli had accomplished that trick. It was easy to see what he planned. He'd loaf across the ecliptic and arrive a day or so late—which would be enough for the penalty, but not enough to hurt his plans. I wondered how he'd gotten the crew to back him up—probably told them I was dead and gave them some smooth story that they swallowed like sugar-coated cascara. If I had been angry before, I was furious now. Martinelli would pay for this—and he'd pay plenty.

TO MY surprise, I found an account listed in my name at the Spaceport finance office. It held slightly over ten thousand credits and a note from Bernstein:

*Martinelli says you're dead. None of us believe it, but time is running out and the 'Queen' will have to be on Earth to finish her contract. Martinelli doesn't want to go—says it's your ship and until you're proven dead we have no right to take off. But I think he's trying to get out of the contract. So whether he wants to or not, he's coming aboard. He'll probably have plenty to say about what we're planning to do with him, so to keep the record straight and get us out of a bind with the law, here's your passage money on the next liner. With luck you should be waiting for us when we land. Sorry we can't wait, but you and I both know the ship comes first.*

*Bernie.*

Good old Bernie! My thoughts jumped ahead. Without a licensed pilot aboard, Bernie wouldn't be able to land on Earth. Sure, he could call one up, but those things take time. It could be a couple of weeks before the "Queen" could get down if they arrived in a crowded period—and all periods were crowded on Earth. I had to get home quick.

I went down to the dispatcher's office. "Anything fast for Earth?" I asked.

"The 'Silver Streak'", he said. "One of IPC's plush jobs with a two-week flight time."

"Good. I'll take a passage."

"Sorry—she's full up. But you can sign up and hope there's a no-show."



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I grimaced, signed, and placed five hundred credits on the line to guarantee my passage. The dispatcher turned to deposit the cash to my passage credit and I took a quick look at the "Streak's" passenger list. One name struck my eye—Bellini—Ivan Bellini! He must have reserved passage before we went after the swamp sucker. But he wouldn't be aboard. The sucker had seen to that. I was almost grateful to the beast.

TWO weeks later I was stretching my legs against the nearly forgotten gravity of Earth.

It didn't take me long to find that the "Queen" was still in orbit waiting for a pilot. She had three days left to fulfill her contract. It took me two of the three days to find a rocket jockey who'd take me upstairs and match orbits with the "Queen", and another half day to persuade my friends around the port to advance me enough money to pay him. But I managed it finally, and half an hour after the jockey got his greedy little hands on the money I was entering the "Queen's" emergency airlock.

Bernie met me on the inside. "Skipper!" he said. "You made it!"

"Naturally," I replied. "After what you did, do you think I'd let you down?" I looked at him with that special look that says so much without saying anything. The same look he had given me on Mercury. "But we're not safe yet," I added. "We have less than seven hours to get downstairs. Now get cracking. We have work to do."

"Yes sir," Bernie said with a grin that nearly split his face.

"Oh, wait a second," I said as he turned toward the companionway.

He paused, half turned in the hatchway.

"Where's Martinelli?"

"Locked in his cabin. Should I let him out?"

I grinned thinly. "No, leave that to me. I'd like to see him again."

Bernie chuckled grimly. I suppose what I was thinking showed pretty plainly on my face.

Since we had a dock reserved, and I had a pilot's ticket for Earth's atmosphere, we received our clearance in quick time and I laid the "Queen" in dock at precisely 2345.15 hours, nearly fifteen minutes before the deadline. The contract had been completed on schedule, and Martinelli would have to pay up. But first he was going to pay in another fashion.

I made my way down to his cabin, unlocked it and dragged him out. He looked at me with goggle eyed surprise. "Lundfors! How did you get here? You're supposed to be on Venus."



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I grinned and shook my head. "You're on Earth," I corrected. "On time. Now pay up—two million one hundred thirty thousand five hundred and twenty seven credits."

"I haven't got it," he said. "I'm broke." He laughed a flat bark that was nervous rather than amused, and I suppose he had a right to be nervous, since there's nothing lower in my book than a contractee who can't pay his bills when they come due.

I poked him in the ribs with a thick forefinger. "What do you mean?—You weren't broke when we left."

"But I am now."

"You still have the symphony?"

He shrugged. "Of course, but what use is it? I can't produce it. Or don't you remember. Raposnikov's will gives it to me only if I can present it at the Decennial Celebration."

"So you produce the symphony."

"How?"

I shrugged. "I don't care how. You produce it, or I'll hang you up to dry. No court on Earth will deny my claim."

"He nodded. "Admitted," he said, "but you can't squeeze blood out of—"

"A turnip," I finished. I eyed him appraisingly. It was a strain not to knock his teeth down his throat, and he wasn't helping matters any. But I held back the temptation and tried to remain sweetly reasonable. Since I held all the cards there was no sense in weakening my hand with a case of assault and battery.

"Why did you do it?" I asked. "What's the idea of trying to break your contract?"

"I told you. I'm broke, busted, penniless. I have no money."

"You had plenty when we started this trip."

"That was a year ago."

"What happened to it?"

"It's gone," he said. He grinned at me. That did it. I hit him then, a good solid smash to the mouth that dropped him to the deck and made my knuckles tingle pleasantly. I'd wanted to do that for better than a month, and the feeling was good. But it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough.

He picked himself off the deck and wiped the blood from his lips. "I suppose I had that coming," he said reasonably.

"There's more," I said. "That's just the beginning. That was for conning me. There's Nalton, Anderson, T'shonke, and Stanley not to mention Vance M'bonga and Tayler. You have a lot more coming to you."

He shrugged. "I suppose so," he said dully. The defiance was drained out of him. "But before you beat me to a pulp, I want you to know I'm sorry. I had no



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intention of killing or injuring anyone, and I had no intention of cheating you until I reached Venus. I did bribe Bellini to keep you out of the way until you defaulted on your contract, but that was only after I discovered that I was broke. I had radioed Earth for more funds and they told me that there wasn't any. I had to make a decision, and knowing how you feel about money, I thought that if I could make you default on your contract, you'd be forced to wait until I presented the symphony. I wasn't going to cheat you. I intended to pay you once I had sold the "Nine Worlds" copyright."

I laughed humorlessly. "I don't believe it," I said.

"That's your privelege. But you can believe this. Right now I'm not worth a cent. Without money to hire an orchestra I can do nothing. Unless I produce the music it's not mine, and if I use a public orchestra I will not receive more than a percentage of the copyright fees. So figure it out. If you want your money, you'll have to help me produce the symphony."

"I suppose you want me to give you a loan?" I asked sarcastically.

"Precisely. The diamonds you have will be plenty." He said this without batting an eyelash.

I COULDN'T help laughing. The sheer effrontery of the man was amusing. He was an artist all right. No one else would have the unmitigated gall to attempt to cheat a man and then try to borrow money from him. I shook my head. "Just what do you think I am?" I asked.

"Sensible, I hope," he said. "I also think you're a man who owes about two million credits to the spaceport authority."

"You're right there," I agreed.

"Then look at it reasonably. If you pay part of your debt with the money you have, you'll still be owing too much. You'll lose the "Queen" and with her your reason for existence. But if you take what you have left and back me you'll recoup everything."

I laughed at him.

"I'll give you a contract," Martinelli said desperately. "You can have all the profits if I can conduct the music."

"It wouldn't be legal," I said. "You could break a contract like that without half trying since it would obviously be given under duress. The money involved—"

"Money! Do you think I care about money? If you do you're an idiot!" Martinelli's voice was angry. "I can always get money. This means more to me than all the credits I can spend. I want the honor of conducting the



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greatest music ever written on its first public performance. I want to be worthy of the faith Nicolai Ilarionovitch had in me. He was my friend. He respected my skill as I honored his genius. He left his music to me because he knew I would treat it properly. Money! Bah! I spit on it!"

So help me he was telling the truth! I was certain of it. Truth has a ring peculiarly its own. Martinelli wanted to conduct that symphony more than anything else in existence. He wanted it badly enough to commit murder for it. I didn't believe his story about Bellini now. He was perfectly capable of arranging my death if he thought it meant that he would be the man on the podium when Raposnikov's score was played. But somehow that didn't matter now.

For the first time I recognized what drove him. He wanted immortality. He had sacrificed everything for this chance and before he ever could grasp it, it was being snatched away. I felt sorry for him.

"I can't understand why it happened," Martinelli said bitterly. "I shouldn't have failed. That money should have doubled. I looked the properties over carefully. They were as nearly certainties as any productions I've ever seen. I can't imagine how they could have gone wrong."

"Do you mean to tell me that you speculated with money earmarked to pay an account?" I asked in a shocked voice.

"It was a legitimate investment."

"In what?"

"Two shows and a musical comedy. They were good."

I groaned. It took a mind like Martinelli's to figure that angelling shows was an investment. "They flopped, I suppose," I said.

He nodded.

"You're the idiot," I said bitterly.

"At any rate, I'm a poor businessman," he said. "Yet I wouldn't have invested if the cost of this trip had been less. Three or four hundred thousand would have made the difference. But since I didn't have it, I invested in the stage properties to make enough to cover your bill and the additional cost of producing the symphony." He looked at me and shrugged. "Now I can do neither."

It was my turn to feel bitter. I had been too greedy. We could have done the trip for less, but I was too interested in squeezing the last credit out of it. And so I'd lost it all. I shrugged. Actually I didn't have much choice about my future. Martinelli was the key to it. If he succeeded I prospered. If he failed I was finished. I had enough wealth to finance him but not enough to



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pay the outstanding accounts, and this bill was too big to write off. There was only one thing to do—take Martinelli to a polygraph, and if he was telling the truth—well—I would like to hear the rest of the symphony with the sound effects we had collected. Men had died to get them, and they deserved something better than nameless graves. They deserved a monument, and Martinelli could give it to them.

"I'm a fool," I said. "I'm just about the biggest fool in the entire solar system, but if you're telling the truth I am going to finance you."

Martinelli looked at me incredulously, and behind him I had the odd impression that Raposnikov was standing there—smiling.

I'VE heard the "Nine Worlds Symphony" a good many times and in a good many places since its first appearence at the Decennial, but in my opinion there has never and will never be a rendition of it like the first. How do I know? Well—Martinelli and I have the only two tapes of that in existence and each time I play mine I hear something new. It's wonderful music. And it is complete compensation for the months of hell I went through to keep the "Queen" while Martinelli screamed, prodded, sneered, cajoled and bossed a hand picked orchestra and sound effects group into the greatest performance that will be heard in this or any other century.

**THE END**


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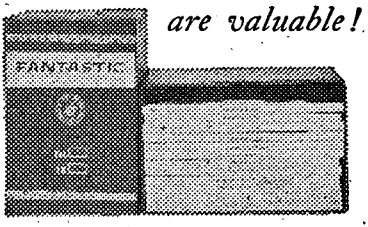

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# TO HEAVEN STANDING UP

By PAUL ERNST

Illustrator ADKINS

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

*THE better magazines, commonly termed the "Slicks", in concert with television and the moving pictures, are dotted with names that first served apprenticeship in the pulps and now have moved on to greater prosperity. The roll call of such notables is long, including such names as Erle Stanley Gardner, F. V. W. Mason, Frank Gruber, John D. MacDonald, William P McGivern, Cornell Woolrich, as well as our spotlighted author this month Paul Ernst.*

*In graduating to the big time, the pulp author sometimes loses a certain type of renown, particularly if he contributed to the science fiction magazines, which success does not always recapture. As far back as 1930 Ernst was copping covers on* ASTOUNDING STORIES *for novelettes with titles like* Marooned Under the Sea, Red Hell of Jupiter *and* Raid on the Termites.

*During the same period he familiarized himself to readers of* AMAZING STORIES *with* Hidden in Glass *in April, 1931 and the satiric* The Incredible Formula, *(June, 1931) where the dead are sustained as active workers by a special method and eventually eliminate most of the living workers.*

*While Farnsworth Wright was editor of* WEIRD TALES *magazine, Paul Ernst contributed in addition to short stories and novels of science fiction, the famous Doctor Satan series concerning an arch criminal who employed the most advanced science for his machinations. Even in* WEIRD TALES *Paul Ernst usually wrote science fiction, but when he turned to a straight weird tale, such as the near-classic* The Way Home *in the Nov., 1935 issue of that magazine, he employed the nom de plume of Paul Frederick Stern.*

*At least four of his tales have been included in science fiction anthologies:* The Thing in the Pond, The 32nd of May, The

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Microcosmic Giants *and* Nothing Ever Happens on the Moon.

To Heaven Standing Up *is a transition story. It appeared in* ARGOSY, *April, 1941. It was one of a half-dozen that Paul Ernst wrote for that magazine on his way to the slicks.* ARGOSY *was the "jumping off place" of the pulps. You either went from there to bigger things or you fell back to whatever category of pulp you came from.* To Heaven Standing Up *displays the fine grasp of humanity and talent for the emotional nuance, that showed that Paul Ernst, like his lead character, Jed Perley, was ready to take wing. He never came back.*

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THE sun was warm on the porch of Walt Bailey's general store, and I let my topcoat slide open and put my feet up on a coil of rope. In the trees on Main Street the birds made songs about spring, and the young fellow stopping in front of the store with a clatter of worn brake rods wore only track shirt and faded khaki pants; it was that balmy.

A fellow named Jed Perley, I remembered vaguely. Worked back in from the shore about five miles for an invalid farmer named Cardwell.

Perley fiddled with the tailgate of his light truck, and I closed my eyes and let the sun get into my bones and drive out the ache planted by pneumonia in March. Nice to loaf a month in this little New Jersey village near the shore.

Perley stumped up the porch steps, nodded to me as he passed the bench on which I was sprawled, and went on in. I closed my eyes till a voice said: "Hello, there. Letting Sol pound Vitamins A, D and G into you?"

Climbing the steps was Singer Smith, black hair uncovered, gray eyes lazy. Singer was a flier. He had a plane in a homemade hangar two miles out of Deerville and picked a free-lance living out of the air by instructing, hiring out for special trips, or dusting crops.

As Singer went in, Jed Perley came back out, carrying a hundred-pound sack of feed effortlessly on his left shoulder. Jed's body was slight but his arms were muscle-corded and his legs filled the legs of his khaki pants with their hard bulk.

He tossed the sack into the truck, stood a moment watching some birds perched on the rim of an old stone watering trough, then came back up on the porch with an odd look—almost of resentment—on his face. After a little hesitation, he sat on the bench next to me, moving his head to follow the short hops of



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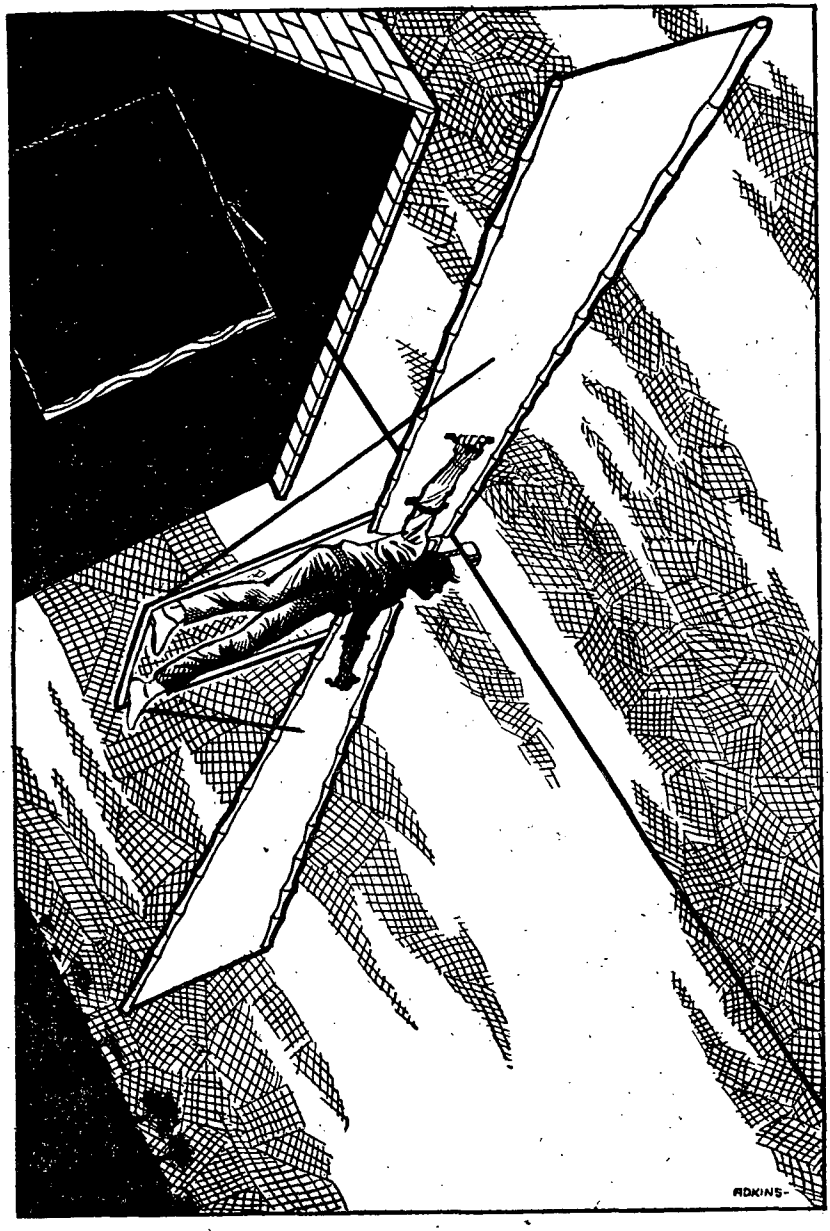




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a couple of sparrows near the trough.

"The damn birds!" he muttered.

I looked at him. You get to know people fast in a village like Deerville, particularly when you're interested in folks anyhow, as I've always been. I'd heard Perley discussed. Usually with laughter.

JED was a nice fellow, but not too bright. Good mechanical sense. Old Cardwell, in a wheelchair with arthritis, would be helpless without him. But thick in the wits and inclined to let imagination run away with him.

Sometimes, as Bailey had expressed it, Jed got to imagining things and pretty soon got to thinking they were true. Hell, retorted a man with Bailey at the moment, Jed was just a plain liar. . . .

"Why 'the damn birds'?" I asked now. "Don't you like birds?"

"Oh, I guess so," he said. "But —it's silly."

"What's silly?"

"Well, look at em. Ain't got any brains at all. And a man's got lots of brains. But a bird can fly, and a man can't. It's plumb ridic'lous."

"Men fly," I shrugged. "Like Singer Smith—"

"Oh, that! I don't mean that, zooming along with a lot of clanking machinery. I mean flying under your own power, like the birds do."

There didn't seem much to say to a thing like that, so I let it slide. Perley looked sideways at me.

"You've read a lot, I guess," he said. "I don't get much time for it, myself. Ever read where anybody tried to fly?"

"Sure," I said. "That's as old as dreams. A long time ago a man tried it. He made wings of wax."

Perley's face wrinkled up. It was a good, broad face with flaring, peasant's nostrils.

"Wax? Funny stuff to make wings of. What happened?"

"He flew too close to the sun," I said, "and his wax wings melted and he fell."

Perley got up jerkily. "Oh, all right. I was just askin' a polite question."

He went down the steps, stocky thighs filling the legs of his pants. The motor of the ancient truck rattled to a start and Perley drove huffily away. The store owner, Bailey came out, a thin, sad looking man with a handlebar mustache.

"Why do you suppose," he mumbled, more to himself than to me, "Jed Perley wanted a thing like that?"

"Like what?"

Bailey looked after the truck. "Yesterday. Came in here and



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got twenty-six yards of glazed chintz I'd ordered to sell the ladies for curtains. What would Jed want with twenty-six yards of glazed chintz? I'm still trying to figure it out."

I shrugged, and after a while I went up the street to my boarding house. Dinner was rich with broth and chicken and potatoes. I'd be hog-fat if I kept that up.

And I'd be even fatter if fate let me drowse on the store veranda bench another month—as I was doing again next afternoon at Bailey's. But my time was almost up, I was sorry to remember. . . .

BRAKE rods clattered at the curb, and Jed Perley climbed out of the ancient little truck. He passed me without nodding, and in the store I heard him ask for two more spools of that heavy waxed thread and a can of shellac. Color? He didn't care. Either orange or white, didn't matter.

He came out, paused, then sat next to me with his eyes on the sparrows at the watering trough. He was gloomy.

"Damn the birds?" I suggested.

"Huh?" he said. "Oh. Yeah. Look, I didn't mean to act sore yesterday, but I asked you a straight question and you kidded me."

"It was a legend," I said. "A fable. I've never believed a man flew on wax wings, either, to tell the truth."

He thought that over, then dismissed it.

"Oh. Well, look. Has any one ever tried to fly under his own steam, no hooey?"

"A lot have tried, no hooey," I said.

"With wings, like a bird?"

"Yes."

"Anybody ever really do it?"

"No, Jed," I said. "And nobody ever will. You see, to fly like a bird a man would have to have arms like tree-trunks and breast muscles so heavy they'd require a breastbone sticking out about four feet to anchor onto."

"Arms?" said Jed, broad face wrinkling in puzzlement. "Why would anybody try to fly with his arms?"

It was my turn to look puzzled.

"You don't walk on the ground with your arms, do you?" said Jed. "Why would you try it in the air?"

"How else would a man try?" I said.

Jed slapped his solid thighs.

"Legs. That's where the big muscles are. That's where your strength is. You'd fly with your legs."

"I don't think I quite . . ." I murmured politely.

"You'd fly standin' up." I'd thought Jed's eyes were dull. They weren't dull now; they shone with jewel brilliance.



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"You'd use your legs, mostly—"

He stopped. His eyes got veiled, secretive.

"I got to run along," he said, getting up. "Say, I'd as lief you didn't repeat what—I've been sayin'. Folks in Deerville think I'm not as bright as I ought to be. They'll be callin' me Crazy Perley next, and the kids runnin' after me. I wouldn't want that."

I looked thoughtfully after the ancient truck as it wheezed away from the curb. Jed wasn't as dull as folks thought him, it seemed. He certainly was onto the town's opinion of him, at any rate. Yet in a way he was more childish than most eight-year-olds.

Giving serious thought to the possibility of flying like a bird! And standing up, what was more! Of all the lunatic things to—

"Hi, loafer." Singer Smith was coming up the steps that creaked to so many feet each day.

I nodded to him, but kept thinking of Jed Perley, and of the feverish light in his eyes, and of Bailey's bewilderment at a farm hand's purchase of twenty-six yards of glazed chintz. Enough of the stuff to make a tent.

Singer came back out, tearing the top off a new package of cigarettes.

"Where's Cardwell's farm?" I asked.

Singer told me: west to Sling's Corners, north to the third mailbox, lane over a hill to a hidden house. I got out my car, little used during my convalescence in Deerville, and drove there.

I DIDN'T KNOW quite what I was going to say as I walked in the late sun toward the figure in the vegetable patch at the rear of the house. After all, I didn't know, really, what the chintz was for. Maybe Jed was getting curtain-conscious too, and fixing up the windows for him and the arthritic Cardwell.

"Hello," said Jed, straightening up as I got to the edge of the patch. He stood with powerful, stumpy legs spread, holding his hoe crosswise in his hands. He looked at me calmly, and whatever laborious opening I'd planned to make went glimmering with his directness. Not as dull as Deerville thought him, this man.

"You came out to see *it*, didn't you?"

"It?" I stalled. But it was silly to evade. "Well, yes, I did. If you'd care to show it to me. Or if there is anything ready yet to show."

"She's ready," said Jed slowly. "I finished her last night. Almost eleven o'clock, and I have to get up at half-past four. But she's worth it."

He studied my face as if committing it to memory. Meanwhile



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he chewed on his upper lip.

"Like I told you," he said, "I wouldn't want to get called around as Crazy Perley. So I ain't let on to a soul about this. I didn't really mean to let on to you. I just wanted to ask a couple questions because you'd read the books and all."

"I'll never let it out so it could get back to you," I assured him.

He led me to the barn and up to the high loft. It was as bad as I'd feared.

THERE was the twenty-six yards, approximately, of chintz. The gayly flowered stuff was stretched taut on a framework of fishpoles. Two frames, rather, each a wing. There were two long poles with the spindling ends bent together and bound. And down the middle was a third pole, for a stiffening spine.

At the thick end, the butts of the poles were split, bound with fishline to keep the split from lengthening, and bolted to a strip of shiny metal that I judged was duralumin. This had a heavy hinge riveted in its center.

"I just happened to see that there chintz," Perley said. He was looking at the pathetic apparatus of fishpoles and cloth as a man looks at his true love. "It's nice and close-wove. With shellac over it, you couldn't ask for a better wing."

The two twenty-foot lengths were lying almost atop each other. Off a little to one side was another part. It, too, was made of the shiny metal. The thing looked at first glance like a plain oval, like a big letter O, made from a bent tube. But a second glance showed that it was not quite that simple.

The top of the O was flattened and bent out like a neck-yoke for carrying two pails of water. At the bottom there were straps, obviously designed to go around feet and ankles. Furthermore, the top half of the frame fitted into the bottom half so the O could be lengthened and shortened like the slide of a trombone. It was about four feet long.

"A couple minutes to bolt the hinges, and she's done," Jed's feverish voice came to me.

I looked at him, and at the frail contraption of bamboo poles and glazed chintz.

"Look here, Jed," I said. "It's one thing to daydream of equipping yourself with wings. Better men than either of us have done that. But it's something else again actually to try. I suppose you're going to strap on those things and step off the barn roof?"

"Why, no, of course not," said Jed, looking almost as puzzled as he had when I'd spoken of flying in terms of arms. "Think I want to break my damn neck? Here,



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I'll show you. I want to give 'er a little workout anyhow. Only take a minute. Show you what I mean right now."

He carried the wings and the O downstairs.

"No, you stay here," he said, when I started to follow.

"Here," was a spot next to the loft door, from which you looked down about twenty feet to the ground. Overhead, a beam ran out the door with a pulley in the end. Through the pulley went the rope to which the hayrack was fastened when hay was to be hoisted from a wagon to the loft.

From above, I watched him bolt the wings to the top of the oval: His hands were trembling a little. I felt sorry for Jed at one moment, and impatient with a grown man for harboring such an obsession in the next. It put him in among the inventors of such things as perpetual motion.

Jed slipped a hook in the top of the ring and tied the pulley rope to it. Then he made a last addition: a slim bar slanting in from about the center of each wing to the bottom half of the O, so that when the O was elongated the wings would flap.

He came back upstairs, hauled on the rope, and the ridiculous arrangement raised till the bottom of the O was level with the loft floor. Jed fastened the rope to a cleat, and there the thing hung, an O with a winged top: —o—, and with a slanting support from the middle of each wing to the bottom section of the O.

CAREFULLY he swung out from the loft door till his feet were on the bottom bar. It went down with him till his legs were almost straight. He buckled the straps around his feet and ankles with his right hand, holding on with his left. Then he straightened.

The top yoke settled snugly around the back of his neck, over his shoulders. He thrust his arms along the middle spines of the flimsy wings, where a hoop came just above each elbow, another at each armpit, and a bar for each hand to grip.

How to fly standing up, in one easy lesson, I thought.

It was almost dusk now, but Jed looked carefully in all directions, as if fearing some one might see from a distance. This end of the barn faced away from the house, so no one could look from there.

"You see how she works?" said Jed, with a note almost of pleading in his voice. "I push down with my feet and at the same time pull down with my arms. That way I get arms and back, shoulders and legs—everything —into it when I haul down on the wings. There're heavy coil springs to go into the sliding



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bars too, to help me shove down hard and quick. Just my weight hangin' on the wings will raise 'em on the upstroke. I won't trouble to put the springs in now."

I shook my head a little, but I was much relieved. At least Jed probably wouldn't kill himself. The rough common sense of the hook arrangement guaranteed that.

He stood there in the shiny hoop. Experimentally he fanned the crazy planes of gay chintz up and down, slowly, like a moth drying its wings after emerging from its cocoon. Legs and arms worked in unison, bringing the wings down in smooth, powerful sweeps, with a springy feathering at the ends as the pliant bamboo bent a little.

"If I can lift myself off the hook," he mused, "I can keep myself up at least a minute or two so I won't fall. If I can't raise off the hook—well, I won't fall that way."

As if impatient, or suddenly bursting with pentup energy, he brought the crude wings down with a whistling sweep of arms and legs. And then was stone-still, crouched in the hoop.

"Did you—see that?" he whispered, after a moment.

"See what, Jed?" Not for anything would I have laughed at him. This thing was too real, too tremendous, to him.

"The rope slacked up! I could feel it! I *lifted* myself a little! Maybe only an inch. But if I can do it an inch, without even the coil springs to help the down shove, I can do it a foot. Or a hundred feet."

"It's pretty dark," I said apologetically. "I couldn't see."

I went out into the lowering night and drove back to Deerville, after assuring Jed I'd keep his secret. I'd seen what I came to see: Jed wasn't in any danger of killing himself with his fool notion. Beyond that, I washed my hands of it.

Funny, though, what the power of suggestion can do to you. There in the door of the hayloft, in the dusk, for just an instant in that last sweep of wings, I actually thought I *had* seen the rope slacken and the hook slide loosely in the ring of the flying frame.

OVERNIGHT, I forgot the silly business pretty completely, being reminded of it again only late next afternoon when Jed Perley rattled to the curb and passed my bench with a conspiratorial nod. He came out with a loaf of bread and a box of table salt, looked around cautiously, then paused beside me.

"I came in to tell you," he said, in a low, hurried tone. "I didn't really have no call to get bread. I just wanted to tell you."

I thought he didn't have quite



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as much color as usual, and his eyes looked as if he needed sleep.

"I went on workin' them wings after dark," he breathed. "And I put the springs in the frame. I really put my back into it."

He stared at me with too-bright eyes.

*"I got off that hook!"*

I had, it appeared, let myself in for something by the purely natural desire not to let any man, even a fool, kill himself. I'd made myself a fellow conspirator by looking at Jed's flowered-chintz wings. The fact that I'd now lost all interest in Jed's delusions wasn't going to let me off.

I wondered what had happened to the hook, that it had failed him. Probably in his gyrations it had twisted sideways and his hoop had slid off.

"Don't you believe me?" said Jed.

"Oh, sure," I said. "What happened then?"

"Well . . . nothing much." Jed looked sheepish. "I batted back against the barn on the way down, but didn't hurt nothin'. It'll be a trick to steer, with no tail. But bats make out with nothing but wings, so I guess a man can. I put in some more hours, not trying to lift off the hook any more, just slanting the wings around to guide me."

I understood the sleepless look, then.

"When did you rest last night?"

"Two in the morning to four-thirty," he admitted. "Keeping the farm going is a long day's job. But gosh, I can't sleep all night when I got flying right at the tips of my fingers."

WALT BAILEY came out on the store porch, and Jed said so long and went to his truck. Bailey looked after him, then grinned at me. "Is Jed gassing about some new contraption?"

"Oh, is he given to contraptions?" I asked.

"Yeah. He's turned out some gadgets that were honeys. To hear him tell it, anyway. Last year it was heat from the sun so you'd never have to buy coal in winter."

"That would be handy," I said.

Bailey's eyes twinkled.

"Jed got twenty foot of four-inch pipe and a hundred-gallon tank from a junk yard. He capped one end of the pipe and led the other through the house wall to the tank, set in his back room. He braced a couple dozen big reading lenses in a row over the pipe, with an old clock to turn 'em with the sun, and they focused like burning glasses.

"All fall, to hear him tell it, the water got hot in the day's sun and stayed hot in his room till morning. Didn't need any other heat at all. Then a couple of us reckoned we'd drive out and see it."



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Bailey laughed at the thought.

"He got out of it kind of smart, at that. Day before we were coming was hotter than November had a right to be. Jed raced in and said his tank had blown up, it got so hot, and Cardwell wouldn't let him set it up again because scalding water had flooded the whole first floor and scared the old man so he fell sideways out of his wheelchair. Jed said he just hadn't thought to put in a safety valve for the steam."

. . . Next day was rainy and unpleasant so I didn't go to the store. I stayed in my room and stewed, and knew I was well again. Time to get back to the city and my job. . . .

There was a tap at my door just before dinner. Jed Perley came in. I'd sure let myself in for something.

"I did it!" he said, voice quivering, before I could even say hello. "I flew last night! More'n a hundred yards. And I only stopped then because I was gettin' too high and didn't quite know how to handle myself. I came down behind the house after circling the barn." He laughed shakily. "I didn't make out so good when I landed. Skinned my knees."

"I wanted you to know," he said tensely. "She works. She goes like a dream. And easy? It's easiern' learning to ride a bike. More'n a hundred yards! You know what I'm going to do tonight? I'm going clear to the shore and back. That's ten miles, but I can do it. It's hard to get up—hard as hell—but once you're there you don't have to work much. You can kind of coast, with only a flip once in awhile to keep up—"

There were steps and the door opened on Singer Smith.

"Hi," he began. Then he saw Jed. "Oh— Hello."

Jed's mouth clamped shut and his eyes got veiled.

"Just goin'," he mumbled to Singer. He looked at me with his face blank. "I just thought I'd tell you. . . . 'Night."

Singer looked at the door with raised eyebrows but didn't comment on the visit.

"Thought I'd drop in for a few words with the patient," he said. "Also I wanted to ask if you're well enough to take a ride. I'm to hop to Boston tomorrow. Be back fairly late, but surely before midnight. Want to go along?"

It was tempting but the papers had predicted rain and squalls, and I thought I'd better not spit in the pneumonia tiger's eye by accepting. "Thanks for the offer, though," I told him.

I HAD a hunch Jed would show up next afternoon. He did. He got to the store about four, looked around to see that we



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weren't being watched, and sat down.

"Well, I did it," he said in a low tone. "I took a long one last night. Only the second night, too. You know, I feel as if I'd been doing that all my life. You got no idea how easy it is, once you get the feel of it. And once you're up."

"You took a long flight?" I said. "Where did you go?"

He looked shrewdly at me.

"You don't seem too excited about it."

"You wouldn't want me to raise my voice or do anything to draw attention to us, would you?"

"No . . . That's right. I went to the shore last night. Ten mile, there and back. I wasn't really sure I'd get that far, but it was so easy, once I was high, that I just kept on going. Besides there was a breeze last night, coming in from the sea. I thought it would be a help on the way back."

He was silent a moment, scowling.

"Well?" I prompted him.

"I rode her back, all right," he said. "But by the time I got near home the breeze was a spanking wind. Sailed me right on by. I couldn't do a thing till I got clear to Mooretown. Then she slacked a little and I landed. And that fixed me. I'd forgot I couldn't get up again."

"Why not?"

"I got to hang from something," Jed reminded me. "I got to have wing room. I can't just hop up like a damn bird because I got to use my legs for pulling, not hopping. So it looks like two things lick me. One is a hard wind—it carries me right along with it and there's nothing I can do about it. The other is settin' down away from home.

"I had to walk all the way from Mooretown carrying those damn wings. Sixteen mile. And every time a car came along I had to duck off the road. I'd have looked pretty funny in a pair of headlights carryin' them wings."

"You'd better get some sleep," I said.

"Sleep?" Jed shook his head, eyes fever bright. "When I can fly? Why, it's going' straight to heaven, that's what it is. Even taking off is wonderful." He drew his powerful legs up and shot them down in unison with his muscular arms.

"Like this and like this and like this. You strain and you grunt and you put everything you got into it. And then you're up there, and you sail a little like a chicken hawk while you rest, and you flap a little and turn your arms to slant your wings for a swoop down and a swoop up. . . . Mister, I couldn't sleep when I could be doin' that."

"I'd like to see that, Jed," I said.



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"You'll see it. I got 'er down right now. I'm going up once again, tonight, to the shore and back. Then, day after tomorrow, Saturday afternoon, I'm goin' to give a public demonstration."

His jaw squared solidly. "There's some in this town that have called me a liar when I told 'em of things. This'll fix that. I'll let 'em have a look at me, soarin' like the birds—"

Bailey's steps sounded in the store on the way to the door. Jed gave me a quick nod, and got into his truck.

THE sky was lowering then, and the wind was freshening. We were going to have the squalls and rain predicted. I'd been sorry during the sunny forenoon that I hadn't taken Singer up on the Boston trip, but I was glad now.

I continued to be glad as it blew and spat till about ten that night. Singer would be jouncing in rough air. But it developed that he'd have the last leg in peace, because just after ten the sky cleared, with moon and stars bright.

Though I noticed as I went to bed at eleven that a hard, constant wind had suddenly come up out of the clear west, to blow out to sea with enough force to rattle the windows.

The wind suddenly reminded me of Jed—and I smiled. Good old Jed. Imaginative Jed. He'd said the wind licked him, and he'd said he was going to fly to the shore again tonight. And here was a hard offshore wind suddenly sprung up out of nothing.

He'd have a tale to tell tomorrow! How he had been borne on the wind, past the shoreline, out to sea. Out, out, till he had finally managed to turn and struggle back, barely escaping a watery grave. It would be gorgeous.

The wind died some time in the dawn because when I strolled to the store about ten next morning it was sunny and calm. I sat regretfully on the bench; regretfully because this was my last day. Tomorrow I went back to town and to a job. . . .

Singer Smith waved genially at me as he came toward the porch. I watched him come up the steps, and inside the store I heard the phone ring.

"Have a good trip yesterday?" I asked Singer.

"Not good, not bad," he said. "Just as well you didn't go, though. Rough for a convalescent on the way home."

Walt Bailey appeared at the door.

"Say," he called, "either of you seen Jed Perley today?"

Singer shook his head. I said, No, why?

"Old man Cardwell just phoned a second time since seven o'clock



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to ask if he's around here. He ain't been on the farm all morning and Cardwell's worried."

"Well, I haven't seen him," I shrugged.

"I guess he'll be back soon," Bailey said, turning away. "Cardwell says all his things are there, and the truck. Said for a while he thought maybe Jed had hurt himself out in the barn. Jed's been out there, half of most nights, lately. But Cardwell managed to hobble out, and there was no sight of Jed. So he guesses Jed ain't hurt."

HE WENT back to his counters, and Singer looked at me half humorously and said, "What, would you say, is the biggest bird there is?"

"The condor, I guess," I answered. "They're said to get up to twelve foot wingspread. South America. Why?"

"Twelve feet, eh? That's smaller than— And you wouldn't see one around New Jersey, would you?"

I stared at him.

"Funny thing last night," said Singer. "I was coming down the shoreline about midnight, not more than a thousand feet up, almost ready to swing inland to my hangar."

He lit a cigarette, and looked at the name of the match.

Suddenly I found that I wasn't breathing. And, suddenly, I found that my hands were clamped over the edge of the bench as if it were about to buck and throw me off.

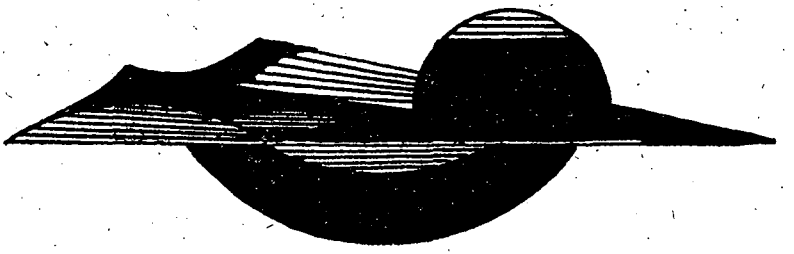
"I thought I saw something like a great big bird, against the stars, for a couple of seconds. But a hell of a big thing, three times as big as your twelve-footer, riding the wind out and out to sea. So big that of course I couldn't have seen anything at all. . . ."

He laughed and flicked the match over the porch rail.

"Getting potty in my old age. Pink elephants, or something. I guess my eyes were tired. You know how your eyes can play tricks on you when—

"What in the *world* is the matter with *you?*"

**THE END**





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# The Living End

By HENRY SLESAR

Illustrator SUMMERS

*There are three things one should never do in life:*

1. *Never count your chickens before they're hatched.*
2. *Never consider the eggshell smashed before you see the pieces.*
3. *Never trust a soothsayer.*

NORM HERBERT belonged to four clubs: the Book of the Month, the Record of the Month, the Fruit of the Month, and the Aqua Velva After Shave. This was the extent of his social life. For eight years, he had been employed as a junior in the stock brokerage firm of Bilpert, Rauss, and Robertson. At the end of his working day, he would journey to an apartment just off Brooklyn Heights, read his Book of the Month, listen to his Record of the Month, eat his Fruit of the Month, and then go to sleep. In the morning, after a bracing dash of Aqua Velva, he would return to Bilpert, Rauss, and Robertson and wait for the phone to ring.

It wasn't that Norm didn't have friends. For instance, there was Paris Porter, the misty, stunning blonde who lived in the apartment beneath his. She wasn't a friend, exactly, but she was a *neighbor,* and Norm considered that close enough. Some mornings, when Norm was overstimulated by his after shave lotion, he even speculated on the possibility of asking Paris Porter for an evening of her company. Usually, the alcohol evaporated in time to bring him to his senses, and he would look at his bland, narrow face and recognize the idea as preposterous.

Norm Herbert had few strengths, but he had an unlimited number of weaknesses. One of these was a weakness for auctions. He could never resist



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the sound of the auctioneer's gavel, the murmer of bids, the old crockery and table lamps and Grecian urns that paraded across an auction platform. One day, he wandered into a mid-town gallery near his office, and watched the dissolution of a rich man's estate. He had no intention of buying, of course, but when No. 1342, Box of Rare Old Books, Uncatalogued, was placed on the auctioneer's table, he found himself lifting a tentative hand.

"Five dollars, I have five dollars," the man crooned into his microphone. "Do I hear seven-fifty, seven-fifty, seven-fifty?" He heard it, and Norm cleared his throat. "I have ten dollars, ten dollars," the auctioneer said, and Norm, realizing that he had made a mistake, shook his head at the man. "I have twelve dollars," the auctioneer said, smiling gratefully at Norm, who shook his hand wildly to indicate that he was out of the bidding, "Fifteen, fifteen," the man said, "going once at fifteen, going twice, *sold* to the man in the straw hat."

So Norm went home that night with a box of Rare Old Books, Uncatalogued.

THAT night, Norm looked at the dusty collection in the cardboard box and sighed. He picked the first book from the stack and admired the binding. It was obviously very ancient, probably fifteenth century, made of wooden boards covered with gold tooled brown leather. The elaborate embossing consisted of four raised-brass ornamental corners, with intricate floral patterns. The title was in Gothic letters in the center boss:

DE PATRICUS

He turned to the first page, and caught his breath at the surpassing beauty of the bookplate, a coat of arms whose chief feature was a pair of remarkably realistic and disturbing eyes. He was interested to see that the manuscript was in English, and went so far as to read the first few pages. It was excrutiatingly dull, and he was about to put it down when he realized what the dull sentences had been about. De Patricus was some kind of soothsayer. His book pretended to predict mankind's future.

Norm ventured more diligently into the book, and found De Patricus' first prognostication. It was in verse, and for a moment, Norm thought it would be as obscure, and as capable of multiple interpretations, as the verses of Nostradamus. Then he read it again, and realized that there was only one way to decipher the message.

In thirte years, the Italian
Madmanne
With Spanish golde and
rogues galore



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In tynder Galleys, three in number
Sailes to God's forgoten shore.

Excitedly, Norm flipped back to the title page.

The date was clearly marked, in Roman numerals. It took him some time to translate it to a contemporary number. 1462.

In thirty years!

There were almost fifty pages of dull and almost incomprehensible text before he found the next verse, but it was worth the hunt.

In Fifteen Hundred and Seventeen
The date Octobere Thirty-One
Ninety-five Questiones must be Answered
Before the New Kingdome is Begunne

Norm's knowledge of history was scant enough, but the Book of the Month had taken care of that. Not long ago, he had received a Dividend Book about Martin Luther, and had read it faithfully. De Patricus had not only predicted the Ninety-Five Theses of Luther, but had named the year and *the very day* of their posting on the door of the Wittenburg church!

The very *day!*

The next few verses were meaningless to Norm, but a few pages later he found:

On the Fourthe Daye of July
In the yeare of Three Sevenes
They will pull the Lion's Taile
Its roar will stirre the Heavennes

What else? Norm thought excitedly. What else but the American Revolution? To the very day of the signing of the *Declaration?*

OVERWHELMED by his discovery, Norm slammed the heavy book shut. He was too fatigued to read further: it was like an overdose of some rich, heady liquor.

He was awake all night. He read verses predicting the beginning of the French Revolution, the rise and fall of Bonaparte, the Monroe Doctrine, the Industrial Revolution. He read about "The Anti-Bible, the Booke which wooed, the Hungere of the Multitude," and, believing the reference was to Marx's *Das Kapital,* looked up the publication date and found that De Patricus had named it *exactly.* He read predictions about Darwin's research, about the outbreak of the American Civil War (again, the date was exact) about the invention of the airplane, and even . . .

In the Hearte of atomes deepe
The mighte Thundre lies asleepe
Then wakenes and creates a Cloude



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The very Earthe itself to shroude.

Trembling, Norm Herbert could barely lift the thick pages at the back of De Patricus' amazing book. Not once had the soothsayer called the shots wrong, not one date had been in error by even a few days, not one future event had escaped his incredible, all-seeing eye.

Finally, he reached the last page.

There was only one verse.

In 1960, all alyve
Will see the Judgmente Daye arryve
Septembere Thirde the Daye, the Houre
The final Acte of Heavenne's pow're
The ende of It, the ende of All
The saunde of Gabrielle's trumpette call
In sudden wrathe, in angry Fyre
This tyred Globe doth then expyre.

The rest was blank.

Norm closed the book, with a final sound. There was no mistaking what it had said. *In 1960 all alive . . .* He squeezed his eyes shut, and tried to remember the date. It was August 24th.

*Ten days to Doomsday!*

He stood up, and the heavy book dropped to the uncarpeted floor with such a thud that the windows rattled. A few minutes later, there was a knock on the door. Norm, moving in a trance, opened it. Even the sight of Paris Porter, more shimmery and provocative than ever in a housecoat, didn't rouse him from the semi-coma.

"All right!" she said, a pretty fist on a pretty hip. "When are you gonna drop the other one?"

"Huh?" said Norm.

"Look, buster, I work in a night club and I need my sleep. I thought the house was falling down. Look at the plaster in my hair!"

NORM looked at Paris Porter's hair. It was bright gold, cascading in luxuriant waves around her lovely face. It was the closest he had ever come to the girl, and for a moment, he forgot the revelations of De Patricus and thought about other things. Then he remembered again.

Ten days!

Without thinking, he reached out and grabbed her by the waist. "I love you!" he blurted. "I've been in love with you for a year!"

"Hey!"

"Please! We have so little time! It's later than you think—"

"It sure is," she said, squirming out of his grasp. "It's four in the morning. Get your hands off me or I'll scream!"

"You don't understand—"

"I understand, brother." She backed off from him, and then



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smiled strangely. "Say, I didn't know you were such a fast-worker. You always looked like such a mouse."

"Even the mice are doomed," Norm muttered.

"What the hell are you talking about? Are you drunk?"

"No! Maybe I should be." He laughed wildly. "Would you like a drink?"

She considered it. "What do you have?"

Norm thought. The only liquid in the house was his after-shave lotion. "Maybe we could go somewhere—"

"At this hour? You're nuts!"

"Maybe tomorrow then. Will you go out with me?"

She smiled, and patted the back of her hair. "You're kind of cute. But I have to be very selective in my business. For my career, you know. I make it a point only to be seen with celebrities and people like that. You know."

Norm looked miserable. "And I'm a nobody. I've always been a nobody. And now it's too late to do anything about it—"

"Call me in a few years," Paris Porter said amiably. "When you strike it rich." She reached over and patted his cheek. Then she pulled the door shut, and went downstairs.

NORM was awake until five that morning, not worrying about the future but reviewing his uneventful past. He fell asleep, finally, in the easy chair by the window, and woke up at ten to a roomful of sunshine. The first thing he did upon awakening was to verify the fact that he hadn't dreamt the final verse in De Patricus' book. He hadn't.

Mr. Rauss, the only surviving member of the firm of Bilpert, Rauss, and Robertson, called him into the office when he arrived at eleven-fifteen. Mr. Rauss was seventy-two, and had the limbs of a pale spider. "You're late," he snapped. "Two hours and fifteen minutes later. In fifty years I wasn't late two hours and fifteen minutes put together."

"Yes, sir," Norm said, hopefully, thinking of the severance pay.

"But I'll give you another chance. Just one more."

"Yes, sir," Norm answered dejectedly.

Wearily, Norm went to his desk, one of fourteen in the noisy, bustling room of the brokerage house. He knew that Rauss wouldn't fire him so readily, not as long as Mr. Fisk was a client. Nathaniel Fisk, heir to the Fisk cookie empire, was a timid soul who had gravitated to Norm Herbert's own timid nature. His faith in Norm's ability as a stock market advisor was the chief reason for Norm's continued employment in the firm. Norm had



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never met Nathaniel Fisk, but he heard his tremulous telephone voice in his sleep. The moment he was seated, the phone rang, and he heard it again.

"Mr. Herbert? I think I'd like to buy three hundred shares of United Copper & Smelting. What do you think?"

"I don't think it's wise, Mr. Fisk," Norm said sadly. "I don't think the time's right to do any serious buying at all. As a matter of fact, I'd advise you to be selling right now."

Fisk gasped. "You mean the market's heading for a decline?"

"Worse than that," Norm said gloomily. "I have inside information. In ten days, there'll be the worst crash in history."

"Oh, dear! How do you know? I mean, I haven't heard any rumors—

"Not many people have, Mr. Fisk, but you can take my word for it. Better convert everything you have into cash. And I mean hard cash, not even checks. Take the cash in hand and waive the rest," Norm quoted, slightly hysterically.

"What's that?"

"Omar Khayyam."

"Who's he?"

"A sort of market analyst," Norm said. "But I'm serious, Mr. Fisk, you know I wouldn't give you bad advice."

"All right," Fisk said nervously. "Sell all my holdings."

"Of course, that might not be so easy to do. You might have to take a little loss."

"But you think I should?"

"I'm *sure* you should, Mr. Fisk."

WHEN Norm hung up, he stared at the phone and chewed his lip, content in the knowledge that he had done the right thing by his customer. Then he had a second thought. What was the difference if Fisk converted his holdings into spendable cash? Fisk had plenty of money; he couldn't begin to spend it all in the ten shopping days left to doomsday. How much more *useful* that money could be, for someone who had nothing. . . .

Ten minutes later, he was in Mr. Rauss' office. The spidery old man grumbled at the interruption, but Norm forced him to listen. He told him about Fisk's order to sell for cash, even at prices below market quotations. It was a chance for the company to pick up a bargain. He saw the old man's eyes gleam with avarice; then he picked up the phone and called Fisk, offering a flat hundred thousand for Fisk's stock. Fisk asked for Norm's advice, and Norm concurred.

An hour later, the trembling old hands of his employer were fiddling with the knob of his wall safe, and removing the neatly-



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stacked piles of green that were concealed inside. He placed them in Norm's hands reluctantly.

"See that Mr. Fisk gets his money right away," he said eagerly. "And I want those stock certificates delivered by this afternoon. Understand?"

"I understand," Norm said.

He *did* understand. He understood how meaningless his life had been up until that moment. He was almost grateful to the soothsayer who had shown him the truth.

With the money in an attache case, Norm Herbert hopped a taxi outside the office building, and gave his home address. He clumped heavily up the stairs to his apartment, anxious to look at the money in private, but decided to make a stop. He paused in front of Paris Porter's apartment door, and knocked gingerly. He wasn't discouraged by the lack of response; he knew that Paris Porter, being a night-worker, would still be in bed. He knocked harder, and she finally roused.

SAY, what's the big idea?" she asked, her voice and face heavy with sleep.

"Miss Porter? I'm sorry to wake you up, but there was something very important I had to ask you. Remember last night, when you told me to come by when I struck it rich?" He smiled inanely. "Well, here I am."

"Would you say that slowly?"

"I have a hundred thousand dollars, and I thought we might enjoy a little holiday together. South America, or Europe, any place you say. I'd like to leave as soon as possible, since we only have ten days."

She leaned closer to him. "Say, you one of these daytime drinkers? I can't stand that type."

"I'm serious, believe me. I have a hundred thousand dollars in this suitcase, and I'd like to spend it as fast as possible. You know what Omar Khayyam says."

"Who?"

"Look," Norm said patiently. "If I could just come in for a second and *show* you." She was too surprised to stop him; he marched inside the room and swung the attache case to the rumpled bed. He snapped the lock, and swung the cover open. He turned to smile triumphantly in Paris Porter's direction, and found her eyes riveted to the pile of greenbacks. "Miss Porter?" he said gently. When she didn't answer, he said: "Miss Porter, are you all right?"

"Huh?"

"I really don't have much time, Miss Porter. I mean, we have to pack and everything, and I still don't have any reservations. Where shall it be? Europe? Mexico? The Carribean?"



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"Rio," Paris Porter breathed. "Make it Rio."

"Rio, it is," Norm beamed. Then, clearing his throat, he thought he should seal the bargain. He leaned over and pecked her cheek. The touch of his lips snapped her out of the coma, and she grabbed him ferociously about the waist.

"You doll you," Paris Porter said, growling like a tiger and bending him backwards.

It was almost an hour before Norm could go about the business of calling the airport and packing his bag. The first airline he called couldn't give him a jet reservation to South America until the end of the week, and Norm wasn't in the mood to wait a single second. He tried every other line that made the trip, and finally agreed to the offer of a South American airline that had a scheduled jep-prop flight to Rio at six that evening.

He had shaved and showered that morning, but he did it all over again. Then he packed a suitcase with one suit, one shirt, one pair of socks, and a change of underwear. The rest of the space was taken up by U.S. currency. It was almost three by the time he was through, and he thumped his foot on the floor as a signal to Paris Porter below. She thumped back with the end of a broomstick, twice, to indicate that she wasn't quite ready. He took advantage of the time to leave the apartment and go to the nearest men's shop. Their stock of tropical suits was small, since it was late autumn, but he managed to find one spectacularly white suit that fit him well enough. He took it without waiting for alterations, and returned to the apartment.

WHEN he walked in, the box under his arm, he saw Mr. Rauss sitting in the easy chair, his toothless gums chewing on the head of his cane. The old man sprung to his shaky legs as Norm entered, and he waved the cane in the air.

"So!" he said triumphantly. "You didn't get away yet!"

"Why, Mr. Rauss! What are you doing here?"

"I should have called the police, that's what I should have done! But I had to be sure—"

"Please, Mr. Rauss, you don't understand—"

"I don't, eh?" The old man cackled, and pointed the cane towards the suitcase on the bed. "And what's that, then? You can't fool me Herbert. I know what you're doing—"

"Listen, Mr. Rauss, you have to understand. It doesn't matter if I take that money, it doesn't matter at all. In ten days, nothing will matter to anybody."

"What are you talking about?"

Norm realized how hopeless ar-



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gument would be. He sighed, and walked past the glaring eyes of his employer and into the bathroom. When he came out, there was a large roll of adhesive tape in his hands.

"What's that for?" Mr. Rauss said.

"Would you sit down, please?" Norm asked politely.

"What for?"

"Please, Mr. Rauss."

Mr. Rauss sat down. Norm took the trembling old hands and wrapped the wide white tape about the wrists.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Tying you up, Mr. Rauss. I just don't have time to *argue* with you about it. I'm very sorry, really."

There was the thump of a broom stick handle on the floor below. Norm thumped back twice with his heel.

"You can't do this," Mr. Rauss whined. "You can't get away with this, Norman."

"Is that too tight?" Norm asked solicitously. "I'll have to tape your feet, too. You don't have any circulation problems, do you, Mr. Rauss?"

"Help!" Mr. Rauss cried feebly and Norm, shaking his head regretfully, taped the old man's mouth. When he was through, he stood back and examined the job critically. It wouldn't have been sufficient for anyone with more strength than Mr. Rauss, but it would do. He bent down and picked up the light, spidery body in his arms.

"Mmmmm," Mr. Rauss said.

"It's all right," Norm told him. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He carried Mr. Rauss into the bathroom, and placed him in the tub.

"You don't have to worry about leaks," he said. "The plumbing's excellent. You'll be all right for a while, Mr. Rauss. I'll telephone the police later and tell them where you are. All right?"

"Mmm, mmm," Mr. Rauss said.

"It's been a pleasure to work for you," Norm said. "But it's even nicer not working for you. Goodbye, Mr. Rauss."

He went back into the living room and stomped once on the floor. Then he went to the closet, got a topcoat and hat, and checked the contents of his suitcase once more. A moment later, there was a knock on the door and Paris Porter walked in. She was strikingly lovely in a tight-fitting satin suit with a feathery boa around her neck.

"All ready?" she said, giggling excitedly.

"All ready," Norm answered. He went up to her and kissed her. "You're the most wonderful girl in the world," he said. "It's really a shame that we only have ten days."



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"But why only ten days, Norman? I still don't understand."

He smiled sadly. "Maybe I won't tell you. Maybe it's better that you never know—that nobody ever knows."

He walked over to the box of dusty books in the corner, and browsed among the contents until he came out with the ancient, heavily embossed volume. Somehow, it felt lighter and thinner than he remembered it. He picked it up and stared at the front cover.

"What is it?" Paris Porter said. "What's the book, Norman?"

"That's funny," he said. "It *looks* like the same book. Only it isn't. It's another just like it."

"Just like what?" the girl said.

He turned the book around to read the title.

It read:

DE PATRICUS: VOLUME II

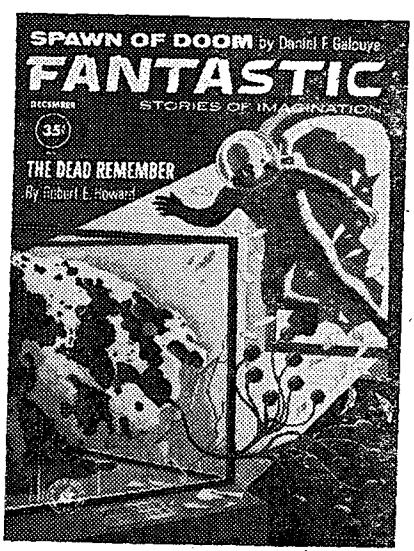
**THE END**


**COMING NEXT MONTH**

**A tale of chilling terror is in store for readers of the December issue of FANTASTIC.**

*Spawn of Doom,* by **Daniel F. Galouye,** grimly pictures an alien life form—the EGMite—that threatens all of Earth. It's a story that provides the thrills of fantasy combined with remarkable imaginings of pseudo-science.

There has been so much demand for more of **Robert E. Howard's** stories that the December Fantasy Reprint will be *The Dead Remember,* a classic vignette of the "curse-from-beyond-the-grave" genre.




**PLUS a handful of short stories and our regular features—all in the December FANTASTIC, on sale at newsstands Nov. 21.**

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# . . . but who knows HUER, or HUEN?

By ROG PHILLIPS
Illustrator SUMMERS

*Some of you old timers will remember the Lefty Baker stories that appeared in* AMAZING *and* FANTASTIC *in the late 40's. We are glad to have him back again. To find out why we were particularly receptive to this story see note at conclusion.*

LEFTY BAKER! I heard the voice and turned my head in the direction I thought it came from. There was no one there. Nothing but lawn and geranium beds all the way to the Ward H Building a couple of hundred yards away.

*What sent me!*

This time the voice seemed to originate just a few feet in front of me, but no one was there.

The thing to do when you hear voices is not to answer. I turned back to weeding the geraniums. The weeds had gotten a good start down in this end of the State Hospital grounds, and my buddy, Fred Mayhem, wasn't doing his share. He was studying a rusty old bobby pin he had found —and probably making scrambled deductions about it with his scrambled brains.

Fred is a retired detective who took too many sappings in his time. He showed no signs of having heard the voice.

*We need your help, Lefty.*

I pulled weeds a little faster. I could ignore the voice, but I couldn't stop from thinking, and what I was thinking was making my head spin.

I had transposed *what* to *Huat* in my mind, and Huat was the Venusian scientist who had come to Earth a few years back to correct the gene pattern of the human race, when I was at the other hospital. Huat had had an invisible space ship.

If the voice I was hearing was real, then there was an invisible space ship setting on the lawn behind me, and someone Huat had sent was trying to get my attention.



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*Lefty!* You must listen!

The voice was getting impatient.

"Why don't you answer the man?" Fred Mayhem said, turning the rusted bobby pin over thoughtfully.

"Answer who?" I said. "There's no one here but you and me."

Fred Mayhem took his eyes away from the bobby pin and looked, then stiffened in surprise.

"Oh oh," he groaned. "I guess one of my attacks is coming on again."

*Lefty! Please! All civilization is going to be destroyed if you don't help us!*

"I'd better get to the doctor fast," Fred said, dropping the bobby pin and starting to get up.

"Relax, Fred," I said, taking pity on him. "I heard the voice too."

Fred looked at me, his eyes filled with suffering.

"You're just saying that to make me feel better, Lefty," he said.

"No I'm not, Fred," I said. "I can prove I heard it. It said, 'Lefty! Please! All civilization is going to be destroyed if you don't help us!' Now, am I right?"

He collapsed with relief. "That's right," he said. "You really did hear it. For a minute there I thought I was going crazy again."

I didn't blame him for being relieved. When he had it bad they put him through the shock treatments, and that's worse than dying, even though it does snap you out of it.

Fred was so relieved that he forgot about the bobby pin and started helping me pull weeds. In no time at all there wasn't a weed left standing. That didn't make me feel bad, because I wanted to get out of there.

We went on to the next geranium bed, a hundred feet away. I was careful to give the invisible space ship a wide berth. I wasn't afraid of us bumping into it. You can walk right through the space where one is without feeling a thing.

What I was afraid of was that you can't see an open hatch until you step through it—and then it's too late. You're already inside the ship.

WE WERE almost to the geranium bed when Fred Mayhem disappeared into thin air. The guy on the space ship had outsmarted me and moved it.

I thought of making a run for it but I knew it was no use. Even if I got away, how could I explain Fred's disappearance? So I resigned myself to the inevitable and kept right in Fred Mayhem's footsteps until, suddenly, there was no lawn, no geranium beds, no hospital buildings.



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There was the interior of a very solid ship, so like the one that Huat had come to Earth in that it might have been the same one. But the thing standing there wasn't Huat, nor even human. It could have been either a robot or some kind of alien insect from its appearance.

Fred Mayhem was dancing around in front of it with his dukes up, and before I could tell him to stop he had stepped in with a short right hook to the glossy brown breastplate of the thing.

What happened when he connected was quite remarkable. He seemed to lift himself up and toss himself backwards, turning over in the air and landing on his feet so close to me that I was able to keep him from falling.

"Please don't try that again, sir," the thing said. "Next time I'll give you a big enough charge to carbonize you."

"You do," I said angrily, "and I won't save Civilization for you. Fred's a nice guy. We're pals."

"You bet we are," Fred said, giving his head an up and down jerk, his gimlet eyes flashing. "Maybe I was wrong about you though. You sound okay, even though you look like a bug."

"Oh." The thing laughed. "I'm so accustomed to wearing my fighting suit these past few months that I forgot I was wearing it. Just a moment."

The two upper arms of the thing took its head and twisted it half around so that one of the two bulbous faceted eyes was straight ahead. Then the claw fingers lifted the head free, revealing a fairly normal human face with a burnished gold tan. The man's hair, combed straight back, was taffy white. His eyes were blue. There were wrinkles of good humor around his eyes. His face was thin, his chin prominently pointed, his nose like a bronze wedge above firm red lips that were smiling.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said, struggling with the body of his suit. "I am Huer, Admiral of the Galactic Fleet." His smile faded. "What's left of it," he added sadly.

"Only two arms?" I said in surprise as he shucked the suit down around his hips. "How could you work those other four?"

"By controls attached to my ears," Huer said, wiggling his ears independently to illustrate. "And the lower arms by relays attached to my eyebrows." He wriggled his eyebrows in rapid independent motion to prove it. "It takes months of training, but it becomes second nature so that you become aware only of the arm movements. Believe me, our war suits are functionally superior to anything ever devised. The bulbous faceted eyes, for ex-



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ample, give full circle vision—dome vision, we call it. But we'd better get down to the purpose of my coming here all the way from Polaris right when a major battle is being fought with the enemy. It's almost a hopeless battle, but our most brilliant Venusian scientist, Professor Huat, is certain that you can find a way for us to win."

"Why should he think that?" I asked. "I'm not nuts, even if I am in a State Hospital. But I'm not very bright or I wouldn't be here."

"ON THE contrary!" Admiral Huer said. "Oh, by your Earth standards that may be so, but Professor Huat estimates your I.Q. at $84 + i420$. You see, Earth psychologists know only of the real number I.Q. value and don't know about the imaginary number I.Q. . . . Everyone has it, nevertheless. Some call it luck, others call it E.S.P., but it is really a form of intelligence."

"What's that?" Fred Mayhem asked suspiciously. He darted me a warning glance and whispered in my ear, "Watch out for this guy. I ran up against a confidence boy in Miami that had a line like his."

"I'll put it another way," Huer said. "Real number I.Q. produces what is called logic. Imaginary number I.Q. produces what might be called hunches that turn out right, premonitions. It can be measured on the psychometer and Professor Huat reported in one of his published papers about his Earth expedition that you are the greatest imaginary genius in the known universe!"

"Well now," I said self consciously.

"Watch out, Lefty!" Fred Mayhem whispered out of the corner of his mouth. "We'd better get out of here." He dug his elbow into my ribs and added, "He's pulling your leg."

"I wasn't born yesterday," I whispered back at Fred. Then, to Admiral Huer, "We're going to have to get back to work, so just what is this problem you have?"

"Yes, of course," Huer said. "I'll come straight to the point. The enemy we are fighting is a species of humans, and may be descendents of the crews of some of our earlier ships that went out to the stars. They outnumber us, and they are destroying all life. Even on planets we have not colonized, which have an abundance of life but no intelligent species, the enemy stops long enough to burn off every square inch of land and bring the oceans to a boil so that even the sea life is killed."

"Why would they do that?" I asked.

"There can be only one reason," Huer said. "Religion."

"I think he's right," Fred



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Mayhem said. "I solved a murder case once where a woman killed her husband because he wouldn't stop smoking. It was against her religion."

I shook my head. "I don't believe it," I said. "What kind of a religion. . . ?" I was beginning to suspect Admiral Huer needed a rest cure.

"They believe," Huer said, "that all life except themselves is evil. They're spreading out over the universe in a Holy campaign to cleanse the universe of Evil."

"That's a shame," I said soothingly. "Well, Fred and me have to get back to the geraniums. I hope things work out for you, Admiral."

I gave Fred a nudge and headed for the exit hatch.

"Wait!" Huer said. "I can prove it!"

"Sure, Admiral," I said, making a run for it with Fred at my heels.

Suddenly we were back on the lawn, with the sun high in the west, the hospital buildings in the distance—and a man and a woman and a girl about nineteen standing a few feet away, staring at us.

I saw the woman's eyes turn up under her forehead until only the whites showed. Then she sagged at the knees and went down. The man turned a sickly shade of green.

The girl said, "See, papa? I'm NOT crazy! They did vanish, just like I said. And now they've come back!"

"Shhh!" Fred Mayhem hissed, giving the girl a sharp, warning look. "We're under cover agents for the Government. Don't breathe a word of what you've seen!"

"N-n-n-no, sir," she stammered.

I headed for the protection of Ward C Building as fast as I could go, with Fred Mayhem right behind me.

WHILE we weeded geraniums for the rest of the afternoon I filled in Fred Mayhem on Professor Huat, the Venusian scientist who had come to the Earth to correct the human gene pattern and had selected me and Marge Afton, the receptionist on the day shift at the old hospital, and had taken samples from us to grow a lot of babies in vats, and leave them on doorsteps all over the world.

I could see Fred didn't believe me, but then, I found it hard to believe, myself. It had happened though.

I thought of telling him some of the other things that had happened to me, like Dr. Winters and his drug that produced immortality, and how he and I had escaped from the old hospital to complete his experiments with



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the drug on rabbits, and Dr. Winters had died of a heart attack and the immortal rabbits had gotten loose, and if they multiplied like rabbits usually do and all their offspring were immortal like Dr. Winters had said they would be just before he died, in a few years the world would be two feet deep in rabbits. I had tried to warn the people about it, but I had just been sent back to the hospital for my pains, and for some unknown reason the world hadn't been overrun with rabbits after all. Maybe some disease killed them off, or maybe Dr. Winters' drug didn't work like he thought it did.

And there was the robot with a loose nut . . .

But there was no use telling Fred any more. He would just become convinced I'd imagined it. Sometimes I wondered if maybe I had. The docs tell you that anything that isn't nice and normal is imaginary, and maybe they're right. Admiral Huat had said I was an imaginary genius. He might be right.

In fact, that was the only thing he had said that made any sense.

A race of people destroying all life on all the planets because their religion said that all life except themselves was Evil. Ha! If they succeeded, what would they have to eat? Dirt?

But even as I tried to convince myself, something in me kept whispering that Admiral Huat wasn't crazy, and that there was such a race, and sooner or later if they weren't stopped they'd reach the Earth and destroy us.

Then I thought of Dr. Winters and his immortal rabbits, and how, with his dying breath, the scientist had begged me to save the world. I had failed—and the world had gone on just as always.

It would this time too, so to heck with Admiral Huer!

Fred Mayhem broke in on my thoughts with a sporadic titter that became a burst of uncontrolled laughter.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"I just was thinking, Lefty," he laughed. "Suppose this Huer character has an identical twin brother named Huen. Then you could never tell if it was Huer or Huen."

"You know what?" I said, grinning.

"Nope," Fred said. "Never met the fellow."

By quitting time me and Fred had laughed ourselves sick. And by bed time the whole thing was so remote that we had forgotten about it.

I should have remembered that the Venusian space ships can be moved right through solid walls. Professor Huat had moved his into the bad ward and res-



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cued me from a straitjacket once.

I didn't remember, though.

FRED and me were roommates. We'd worked pretty hard all day. When lights out came we were ready for bed. I was asleep in less than five minutes. I wasn't even awake long enough to say goodnight to Archy, the night attendant, when he came around, like I usually do.

The next thing I knew I was wide awake, and back in the ship again.

"What the. . . !" I said.

Fred was with me, his eyes blinking like those of a sleepy hawk.

"Ah, I see you have awakened," Admiral Huer said. "I gave you an injection that is the equivalent of ten hours sleep. You needn't worry about being missed. While you were weeding the plants I was busy making life size models of each of you, complete with breathing mechanism and a pulse, so that even if the night attendant turns on the lights he will think it is you in bed asleep."

I became aware of something different about the ship. A faint hum.

"We're in space," Admiral Huer said. "I realized I hadn't convinced you. The only way to convince you is to take you to Venus to a prison camp where we are holding a few of the enemy, and let you see for yourselves. We'll be there in a few moments now."

"And how do you expect to get us back to our beds before morning?" I asked.

Huer smiled. "The trip takes only ten minutes Earth time," he said. Lights blinked on the instrument panel. "Ah, we're here," he said.

He made a few adjustments on the instruments. The humming stopped.

"Before we leave the ship," Huer said, "I want to complete what I was saying this afternoon. I think you may understand better if I tell you something from your own history. Once Earth and Venus had avenues of commerce, and we had our representatives on Earth. Since we are accustomed to a thinner atmosphere than yours at sea level we had our various embassies on mountain tops, such as Olympus. The people of those times, all over the world, knew of us. But what happened? We found it no longer profitable to carry on commerce with Earth. In a few generations the people of Earth stopped believing the stories of their elders about representatives from another world. The facts became distorted into legends, the legends became fairy tales. Today your civilization is



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absolutely convinced that Loki and the rest never really existed. That is quite natural.

"Our ships that go outward to the stars, as I have told you, carry machines that make food out of nonliving matter. The crew knows of its own knowledge that plants and animals exist. But what if one of those ships is wrecked on a barren world and its crew builds airdomes, more food machines, and has children? The children are told of their heritage and their origin, and tell it to their children. In fifteen or twenty generations the original facts become distorted. *No one alive has ever seen any living thing other than human beings!*

"They see the ancient pictures of dogs and cats and plants. They come to believe they are the products of the imagination of ancient artists, and never existed.

"In time they come to believe that human life is unique. This belief becomes the foundation of their religions. Then, as their numbers increase to a few billions and their industry expands, they build fleets to explore space.

"Imagine their horror when they encounter other life, as they must eventually. It is to them as horrible as leprous fiends from Hell would be to you. Somehow, to them, God's clean universe has become contaminated, and it is easy for them to believe that it is their Divine duty to cleanse the universe of this unspeakable filth called non-human life.

"They encounter other humans. But what humans! Stinking from the odor of the unspeakable filth they have eaten. The plants that grow like a disease above the pure granite, the muscle tissue of the horrible animals. They have eaten them. They belch, they pick the bits of filth from between their teeth. They are worse than the unspeakable plague upon the universe that is their subsistence!"

Admiral Huer stopped talking. Suddenly he chuckled, and I became aware that I had been horrified at this picture of myself.

"Now you can understand what they think of us, Lefty," he said. "And why they kill us and will go on killing us—unless YOU find a way to stop them. We've tried everything. We've finally had to admit defeat."

He strode to the exit hatch. There he turned and looked at me and Fred, smiling sadly.

"Are you ready now to see these unbelievable but inevitable byproducts of human error?" he said.

"THEY can't see or hear us," Huer said as he led us along corridors that seemed to us to be catwalks between rows of glass cages.

In each cage was a man, but what a man! Perfectly propor-



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tioned and so handsome that he made the average person seem a distorted freak. So clean looking that it was impossible to imagine them ever becoming dirty.

"They are germ free," Huer said quietly. "When they die they don't rot. Flesh can only rot if it contains bacteria, and not so much as a microbe exists where they came from."

"Have you tried putting animals in with them so they'll get used to them?" I asked.

"We've tried everything we know," Huer said. "When we've put animals in with them, they either go into convulsions caused by extreme revulsion, or they kill the animals. We've tried giving them only cooked meat and vegetables to eat. They die rather than eat it. We've tried reasoning with them. They consider our common sense blasphemy."

"If you gave them a ship do you think they'd head back to their own people?" I asked.

"I'm sure of it," Admiral Huer said, giving me a sharp look.

I grinned. "You know what?" I said.

"Of course," Huer said. "I'm sorry he isn't here but—"

"It was just a figure of speech," I said. "What I mean is, I know the answer. Take us back to the hospital."

"Can you tell me what it is?" Admiral Huer asked.

I shook my head. "Fred knows the answer too, I think. Don't you, Fred?"

He frowned for a second, then his face cleared. He chuckled. "If you're thinking what I'm thinking," he said.

"I am," I said. "Take us back to the hospital, Admiral, and in maybe twenty-four hours we'll give you a secret weapon that will win you the war without firing another shot!"

I WASN'T as sure it would work as I made out to Admiral Huer. It wouldn't—if the allies we were going to enlist were as finicky as the enemy about their food. I doubted, though, that they would choose death rather than eat.

As Admiral Huer's space ship sped back to Earth a thousand thoughts flashed through my mind. From the occasional chuckle from Fred the same thoughts must have been going through his.

To test him I said, "An army travels on its stomach."

He laughed his head off. Then he said, "If you can't lick them, join them."

We rolled in the aisles.

"To know them is to love them," I gasped.

We roared.

Admiral Huer became more and more mystified. Finally I took pity on him.



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"On Earth," I said, "there is a race that is perhaps as intelligent as the human race. At least those who are friends with it say so. They're a gypsy race. They travel in caravans all over the world. You're liable to meet them anywhere, and if they like you they'll join you and go where you go. We get them at the hospital quite often. In fact, they're the only non-human species a state mental hospital can legally accept. The hospital has special facilities for handling them, too."

"This is most interesting," Admiral Huer said. "Professor Huat mentioned nothing of this in his papers. What are these interesting creatures, and how can they help us turn back the enemy?"

"They'll live right with the enemy," I said. "The enemy will either learn to accept them or go crazy trying to get rid of them. Maybe ninety-nine out of a hundred of the enemy will go crazy, but one out of a hundred will eventually become attached to them. Once they accept one form of life that isn't human, they'll begin to accept the rest."

Huer was shaking his head.

"It wouldn't work," he said. "The enemy would kill them at once. If, for some reason, they couldn't all be killed, they'd certainly keep these creatures away from their supply of food and starve them to death."

Me and Fred rolled in the aisles again for five minutes, while Admiral Huer watched us, puzzled.

Finally I stopped laughing long enough to gasp, "The enemy can't keep them away from their food supply, because the enemy will BE their food supply. They're fleas. Lice. Cooties. You'll see."

He still didn't understand.

"Little creatures," I explained, "that live on people, lay their eggs on them, hatch out on them."

He still didn't get the idea.

"You'll just have to take our word for it," I said. "Now here's what we'll do. When we get them we'll have them in a paper bag. Whatever you do, don't open that paper bag. Have all your prisoners ready on a ship that can take them back to their main fleet. At the last minute before you let them go, throw the paper bag in with them and close the hatch. Then let nature take its course. If it doesn't work—well, that's the end of our civilization."

"HOW'RE you going to work it?" Fred Mayhem said the next morning after breakfast when we headed for the geranium beds.

"I've been wondering that myself, Fred," I said. "I think I've got an idea. In fact, I think it's



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the only thing that would work. Neither of us could just walk into the in-patient building, because our shirts and trousers have *Mable Farnsworth* stamped on them, showing we're already living here. So one of us is going to have to get some civilian clothes some way. Right?"

"Right, Lefty," Fred said. "But how?"

"Take that guy coming toward us," I said. "He's about my size."

"So he is!" Lefty said, a light dawning. "Hey!" he called to the fellow.

"Yes?" the man said, smiling.

"I'm Joe," Fred said. "This is my buddy, Alfred."

"Pleased to meet you," the stranger said. "My name is Oscar Fell. I drove down from the city to visit my brother, George. But it's over an hour until visiting time, so I was just walking around."

"So you have an hour to kill, eh?" I said. "That's fine. Joe, here, and me, we have a problem. I wonder if you could help us."

"Be glad to," Oscar Fell said.

I glanced toward the nearest building nervously. "We can't talk here," I said. "Let's go over behind those bushes where the guards won't see us."

"Well, I don't know . . ." Oscar Fell hesitated.

"Would we be given the freedom of the grounds if we were dangerous?" I asked innocently.

"Okay," he said, guardedly.

"We're gardeners," I added, showing him the claw toothed tool I used to dig weeds with. You can buy them in any dime store.

"Let's go," Oscar said.

We fell in on either side of him. Our goal was a thicket of bushes with a picnic arbor in it. We went in, and no one would be able to see us unless they came in too.

"What's your problem, fellows?" Oscar Fell said.

"Just this," I said, smiling happily. "I have to escape so I can kill some people they wouldn't let me kill when I was out before."

He turned pale. "H-h-how many people?" he asked.

"Six," I said. "I've always wanted to make it an even twenty, and I've only killed fourteen so far. Joe here has killed his twenty, and I'm jealous. Isn't that right, Joe?"

"Why don't you kill our friend here?" Fred said. "Then you'd only have to kill five more."

"Nah!" I said, shocked. "Fair is fair. If he lets me have his clothes so I can walk out the gate, I should let him live."

Oscar Fell was already taking off his clothes. Two minutes later I had them on, and he had on mine.

"Keep him here until I get back," I said to Fred. "And just



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in case you cheat and kill him while I'm gone, I'm going to kill seven people. The first seven I meet."

"But Alfred," Fred whined. "That will make you one up on me."

"So it will," I sneered triumphantly, and hurried out of the picnic arbor.

ALL there was to do now was hang around the entrance to the in-patient building and wait for the police truck from town. I was safe enough, so long as Fred kept our patsy quiet.

I had less than half an hour to wait. I stood near by when they unloaded, and was glad to see that two of the new patients were far gone winos whose clothes were fairly black with little friends.

I had no trouble joining the line. After all, the cops weren't expecting anyone to break into the line.

I knew the routine inside. I'd been committed once myself. We went past a desk where a guy took our names. We were herded into cubbyholes to undress.

I knew the orderlies would have their eyes on the two winos and want to grab their clothes and get them to the incinerator as fast as possible. As I entered one of the cubbyhole dressing rooms I heard an orderly tell one of the winos to put his clothing in the paper bag, and set it in the corridor.

I waited, peeking through the curtains, until I saw the paper bags.

Quick as a wink I was out and had grabbed the two paper bags. I could feel them rustling with movement.

"Hey you there!" a voice exploded behind me.

I broke into a run. Out through the reception room, out through the door where the police were just getting back into their paddy wagon.

They saw me. Suddenly I knew I would never make it.

The next instant Admiral Huer materialized out of nowhere. I thrust the two paper bags into two of his hands and ducked to one side.

A cop who was making a flying tackle to bring me down seemed to freeze in mid air, his eyes bulging with terror. Then he crashed into Admiral Huer. Both of them fell backward—and vanished.

The next second the cop came flying out of nowhere. He was babbling in terror. The other two cops pulled their revolvers out and started shooting. Two flashes of blue light materialized and connected with the guns. The cops holding them started to jerk spasmodically like they were connected to high voltage wires.

Nobody was paying any at-



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tention to me, so I ran. I made it back to the picnic arbor.

"How many did you kill?" Fred Mayhem asked eagerly, his face twitching.

I sneered triumphantly. "I'm TWO up on you now," I said.

"Dog gone!" Fred said in awe.

Oscar Fell was practically paralyzed with terror. He took off out of the picnic arbor, crashing through the bushes and running toward the parking lot near the entrance to the grounds. He never made it. The cops took after him, firing shots over his head.

Fred Mayhem and me slipped out of the picnic arbor to the nearest geranium bed and began weeding industriously.

A month passed. I began to wonder if my scheme to save Civilization had worked. The more I thought about it the less sure I was. Fleas are particular. They don't take to just anybody. Even if they did, DDT would get rid of them—except that a race of people who didn't believe in the existence of fleas probably wouldn't know about DDT . . .

Then, one day, when Fred and me were weeding a flower bed around back of the Ward J. Building an arm materialized near us and beckoned.

Fred and me stepped into the invisible spaceship.

It wasn't the same ship. It was about ten times bigger and there were hundreds and hundreds of people, half of them Venusians and the rest looking like those prisoners we had seen, except that these were dressed in military uniforms and togas and kilts and other styles of clothing. But they all had one thing in common—little red welts and little black things crawling on them. They were the fleabittenest bunch I'd ever seen, and they seemed happy about it.

Admiral Huer quickly informed me what it was all about. Peace had been declared and I was to receive some sort of award for having saved Civilization.

The ceremony lasted almost two hours, and when they pinned the medal on my chest (I was only the third person ever to receive this highest award) I felt humble and proud.

I wear that medal now. Sometimes when we are weeding the geraniums Fred Mayhem comes over and feels of it, and we both choke up with pride. But of course no one but Fred knows I wear it. Nobody can see it.

It's the Invisible Galactic Star-and-Crescent.

**THE END**

**During the week-end of July 1st and 2nd, your editor attended the 14th Annual Westercon-Baycon—held in Oakland, California. At that time she was presented with an award for efforts toward the improvement of the Z-D twins. Given by a group known as The Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society, it is the Invisible Little Man award (presented but twice before to George Pal and Ray Bradbury). Though the trophy itself is a handsome one, the top bears only two footprints. Proof enough that the little man is, and always will be there. Hence, our special fondness for this Lefty Baker adventure.—Ed.*



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(*Continued from page 6*)
Greco, who rather dramatically reprimanded (and that's putting it mildly) a Mrs. Alvin A. Stewart for not liking David R. Bunch. So, let's start all over again—

Dear Mr. Greco:

You say that Mrs. Stewart's letter was inane babbling, yet an analysis of *your* letter sums up absolutely nothing. You say that Bunch can be compared with O'Neill and Wilder, and that he writes delightful fantasies. Well, I can say that Cele Goldsmith is a polka-dotted mudhen, but that doesn't mean she is one, does it? I have furthermore come to the conclusion that you are either Bunch's grandmother and/or an employee of American Can Corporation.

You seem to be such an intelligent chap and competent Bunch critic that my native curiosity has been aroused. Won't you please write another letter, and this time give us something to substantiate your beliefs of Bunch's greatness? Mrs. Stewart and I, not to mention FANTASTIC's other 38,000 readers, await your answer.

I personally believe that Bunch is president of Alka-Seltzer, and that this is some gigantic sales gimmick to tempt people to buy his product after reading about Moderan. I also believe that if you took *any* Bunch story and waved it in front of a flock of low flying hawks, the stench would knock them all over. Of course, this might prove to have great commercial value in areas overpopulated by hawks, mightn't it?

James Turner
R.R. # 1, Box 415
Collinsville, Illinois

● *Just keep those hawks away from our polka-dotted mudhen. And how did you guess about Cele, anyway?*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for the past year or more, starting with the issue in which appeared Ward Moore's "Transient." I prefer AMAZING and FANTASTIC over all corresponding magazines in the field.

Ye following consisteth of ye plaudits and ye questions:

Enjoyeth I ye reprints, especially ye Howard effort (for are not all writings efforts?) Ye work of Leiber concerning Fafhrd and ye Grey Mouser, plus ye works of Herr Sharkey, whether jestingly or horrifically ("No Harm Done"). I be addicted to Howard, and enjoy all stories of the type done by he and Leiber (an escape device, I'll wager!)

Concerning "Transient," I have trouble seeing ye world in a normal way after reading it. Ye common and ordinary things appeareth in a way distorted as



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though ye observer were partaking of ye cinema. Has another been affected ye same?

Couldst thou print a bit of work by Abraham Merritt? Heardeth I much of him, but alas, seeth I nothing.

Concerning ye issue number seven, volume ten, July: all was done well, especially "Forest of Unreason" and "No Harm Done."

Ye statements which starteth controversy: Herr Sharkey enjoyeth I. A talent great, and ye humor large is his. Wroteth he one weak tale, which, fortunately, recalleth I not. But does not each writer have weak moments, which, unfortuantely, are used as examples of his work by those who say, "He hath a lean and hungry look." (Yea, verily, yea)?

I also enjoy fantasy, such as de Camp's (pause to duck brickbats of evil thought thrown by ye inveterate *science*-fiction enthusiasts who read ye magazine to scorn the works enclosed). While each formeth his replies, I close.

J. J. Tilton
Box 799, Fort Clayton,
Canal Zone

● *Ye manner of writing driveth us nuts, but, forsooth, ye comments ye maketh sootheth our souls. Verily!*

Dear Cele:

Herewith a clarification of my letter in the August FANTASTIC.

I admit my letter was a *little* muddled; but the point I was trying to make is that a fan will remain true to the mag that gives him/her/(it?) an introduction to Fandom. The fan will continually buy the mag, even though it may drop in quality or his reading time is cut short by fanac or a job. The fan becomes sentimental about the mag, and doesn't care if he has to sacrifice valuable fanzine reading time to be able to keep up with the stories. Clearer now? I thought not . . .

As to the stories, "Passage to Malish" and "Stranger in Paradox" both vie for top story; but the former gets my vote for best of thish. As to the rest, Sharkey's and Porges' tales both showed slight originality, though Porges' seemed a trifle trite in the theme; but was offset nicely by the manner in which it was handled. The rest of the stories —including the 'classic'—were, I'm afraid, rather poor.

Norm, how *could* you?! It's *The NINE Billion Names of God;* not *Ten!* Check up when you're writing your editorials, eh?

Lawrence Crilly
951 Anna Street
Elizabeth, New Jersey

Dear Editor:

In your August issue of FANTASTIC, you made mention in the editorial about Arthur C.



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Clarke's "The Ten Billion Names of God." If I am right, which I feel I am, it should have read "The Nine Billion Names of God," unless he had two similar stories with different titles. I would like to know if I am in error or you are. If you do feel you are right, your ideas clash with those of Ballantine Books and Frederik Pohl.

Bruce Serkin
3876 Berger Avenue
Bethpage, L.I., N.Y.

● *All you folks are right, and we are wrong. But what's a billion names to God?*

Dear Editor:

A belated note of congratulation—the July FANTASTIC was the best stf mag to appear last month. Not that it was so great—not up to the May ish, for instance—but all the others were worse. A sad state of affairs. But your zines are the one sign of improvement in an otherwise bleak world.

Now to the August ish. My verdict—excellent! To begin at the beginning:

Cover: mediocre in concept; excellent in execution. But I don't think Atlantis would have looked *that* much like New York.

"Goodbye, Atlantis"—not bad, but not so good for Anderson. It sounds like something PLANET rejected 10 years ago and he just got around to rewriting. Still, it moves.

"The Root of Ampoi"—CA Smith is never bad, but you've gotten one of his lesser stories here. Scientifically nonsense, of of course—but thank heavens you don't balk at fantasy!

"One Small Drawback"—Is this guy really Garrett? His weird sense of humor seems to resemble. Anyhow, this is one of the neatest twists on the psi story I've yet seen.

"Stranger in Paradox"—Thank the Lord somebody is still writing good action-adventure; that somebody being Keith Laumer, who is on his way to becoming my favorite current author. This is in the fine tradition of "Worlds of the Imperium". Laumer reminds me of early Williamson, before he went philosophical and was just writing stories.

"Report on the Magic Shop"—will this Porges fellow never run dry? This makes *four* straight months he's come up with a little gem now.

"Passage to Malish"—from an author whom I usually dislike, this was good, but not quite up to the three preceding it. If the Laumer was reminiscent of Williamson, this calls to mind van Vogt.

"Policeman's Lot" was the weakest story in the issue, although it started out well in-



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deed, primarily because it violated scientific principle in the ending. This is a delicate point—I said I didn't mind in the Smith yarn, yet it ruined this story. Why? Well, I can swallow the assumption that the Root of Ampoi can make a man grow larger without asking the obvious questions about where the extra mass comes from, or how hardened bones grow, because of the spirit in which it was given. And indeed, I don't boggle at the size—shifting in this same story. But it's an elementary fact that if a man is shrunk down to microscopic size, he won't be damaged by a fall that would kill a full-sized man, not only relatively but absolutely. The strength of his body goes down with the square of his height, while his mass—and therefore the force of his impact after falling a given distance—goes down with the cube of his height. Actually, air resistance would heighten this effect—I have considerable doubt that he would land at all, if he were as small as the story indicates. Brownian movement would keep him aloft. But in any case, the author should be consistent. On page 121 he clearly states that Dexter was subject to the cube-square law as regards growing—he should stick to his guns when size goes the other way. If he had made the story an out-and-out fantasy, in which somehow the fellow could change size without changing weight or strength, I could have swallowed it, but when he tries to be scientific then he should be scientific all the way. The story was otherwise enjoyable.

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*We constantly strive for additional space in* Fantastic, *but the economics of publishing are made of stern stuff. We will keep fighting the good fight, however.*



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**EDITORIAL**

(*Continued from page 7*)

ments can be construed to mean almost anything you want. So don't take the test to find out deep inner meanings; do take it if you want to have a bit of fun.

* * *

CAN it be that there is a revival of interest in fantasy among non-fans? A small sign of such a resurrection is the publishing this month by Crown Publications, of The Xanadu Library, a new paperback line that will reprint celebrated works of imagination, mysticism and fantasy. Modestly-priced (and with illustrations where the original edition had illustrations), the first four titles in the series will be: *Jurgen*, by James Branch Cabell; *Kai Lung's Golden Hours*, by Ernest Bramah; *The Lost Continent of Mu*, by Col. James Churchward; and *Om, the Secret of Ahbor Valley*, by Talbot Mundy. We dedicate this free plug for Crown in the interests of more and better fantasy—and fantasy readers. —N. L.

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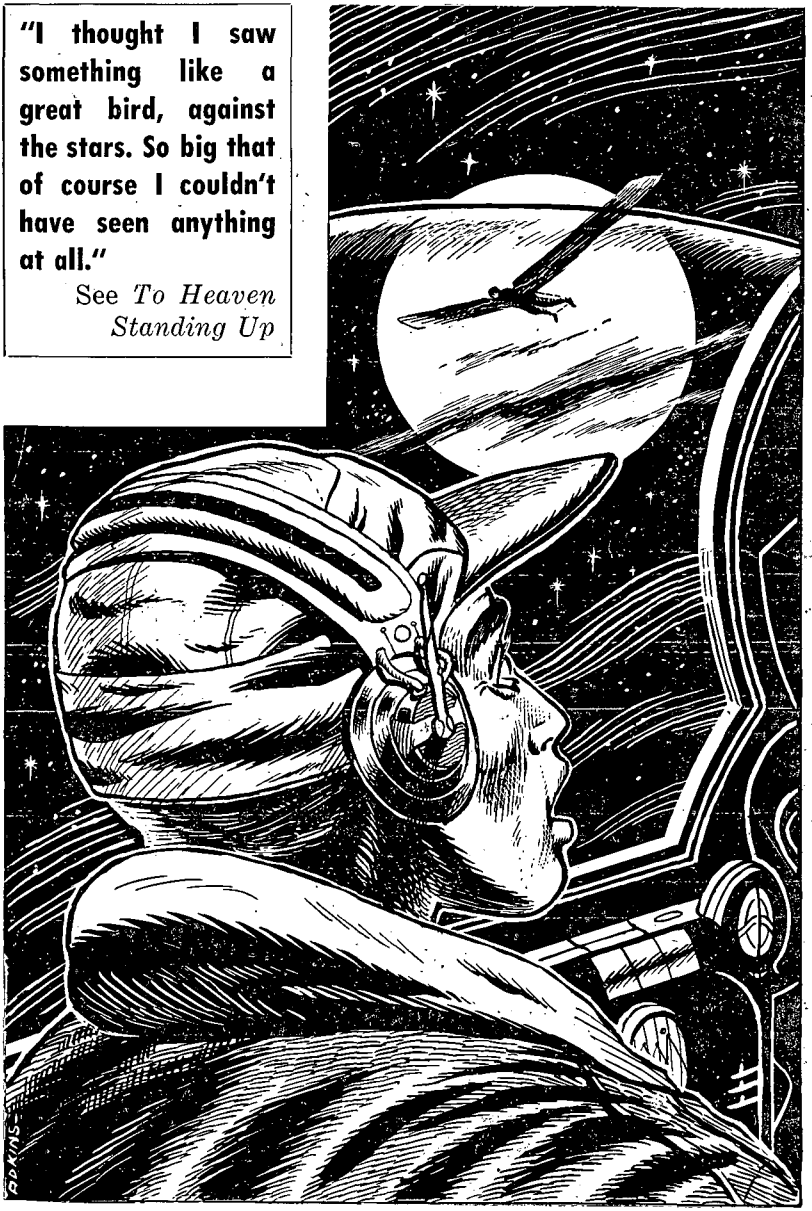


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